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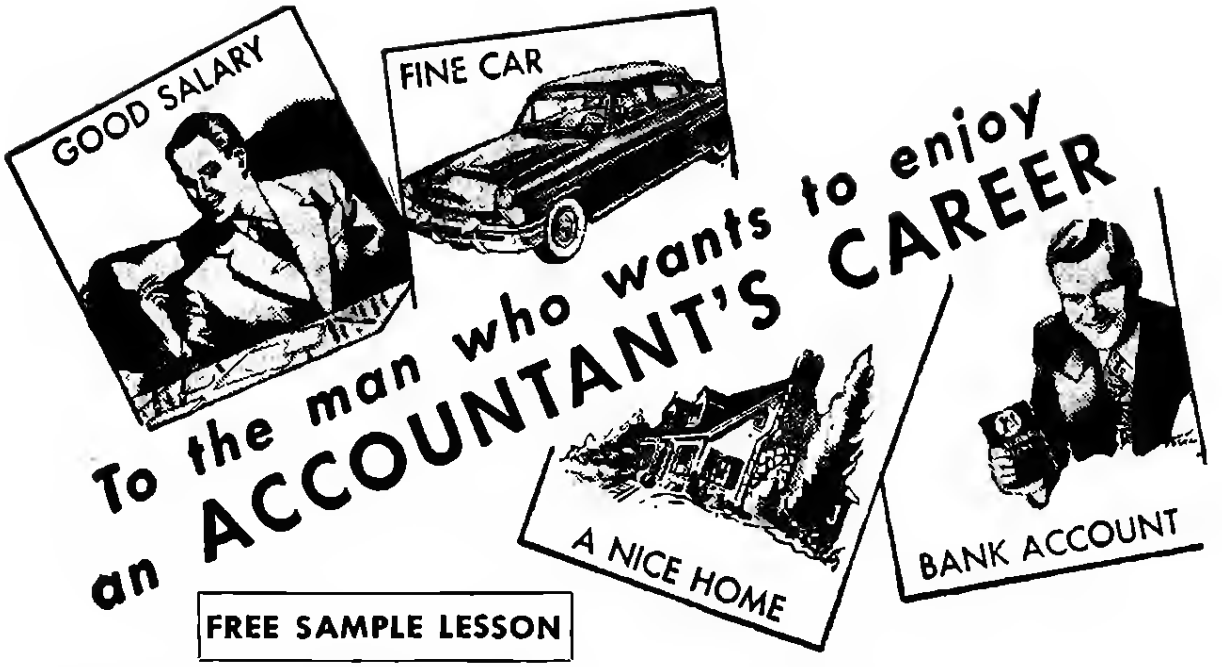
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The Editorial

A FEW years ago *Madge* introduced interstellar photo covers to the science fiction field, and they proved very popular. We've run quite a few photo-covers and we're happy to say that more are on tap for future issues. In answer to a number of inquiries, the reason we don't run them with more regularity is that a photo-cover requires a great deal of planning, artistic ingenuity, and downright work.

BUT we haven't been sitting idle waiting for somebody else to come up with another cover innovation. We've been studying popular trends for some months, and have come up with an interesting fact. Calendar art is by far the most popular form with most people. So what has this to do with IMAGINATION?

WE got the bright idea that it would be a novel venture to incorporate true calendar art into a science fiction cover. What sort of calendar art? A landscape? A seascape? Nope, there's one that stands head and shoulders above all others, utilizing a word that popped into prominence in the Armed Forces. Pinup!

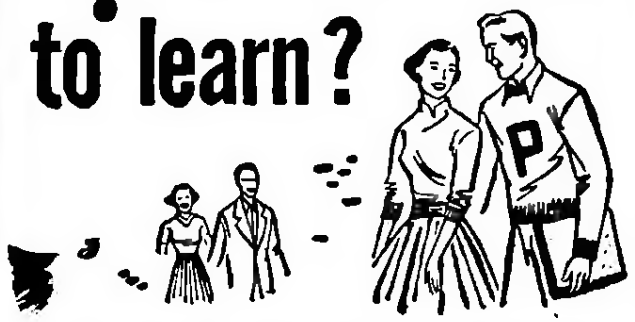
Hold on to your hats. We don't mean the out and out cheesecake variety, but the artistic, whistle-with-approval pinup. So we sat down and talked it over with Harold McCauley, one of the top commercial artists for our money (the Mac girl has adorned everything from Coca-Cola to Blatz to Trucking ads) and Mac thought we had a terrific idea.

SO how do we incorporate a calendar type pinup in a science fiction cover? That's the secret we'll keep until you get next month's issue! But take it from us it's never been done before in science fiction, and we expect you'll be shouting for more. So haunt your newsstand on October 28th . . . . . wlh





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DON'T PANIC!

By

Geoff St. Reynard

January 9th, 1955 began like any normal day on Earth. Then suddenly our planet tossed in a death agony. The Green Men had landed . . .

DESPITE conflicting reports, the Air Force believed in the flying saucers. The scares began in 1947 and as a responsible agency the Air Force had to start investigations. At various times they'd cautiously release some information; then there would be some hysteria and they'd hurriedly debunk the whole business as "mass



hallucinations" and "crackpot theories" until the public had regained its balance, when they'd start letting out bits of truth once more. The nature and implications of the saucer sightings made this on-again-off-again policy necessary in dealing with such an unstable thing as a war-nervous, tensed-up population. If the truth about the saucers had been known, the entire truth, then the Air Force could have published it and the country would have accepted it in stride; but the mystery that clouded the strange ships was susceptible of too many interpretations.

In December of 1952 a blue-lighted saucer was sighted, without a shadow of a doubt, over Laredo, Texas. In January of '53 a whole V-formation of blue objects appeared over Santa Ana, California. These were military sightings and beyond question. There were many before and even more afterward. Some of them mentioned blue lights and some other colors, and the daylight viewings talked of silver metallic luster.

The first low-flying saucer to be reported authoritatively was that which flew over the Capitol in Washington at 11:18 a.m. on Saturday, Christmas Day, 1954. It was caught by the cameras that were making a telecast at that time of the festivities in Washington, and beamed without explanation all over the country. A few minutes later the screens of America's viewers went blank and then the President appeared to urge calmness and sanity. There was no question of mass hallucination and crackpot theories any longer. The saucer was perhaps three hundred feet broad; it was of the usual shape reported in previous sightings, round with a central cabin, and it was green in color. It had flown comparatively slowly, at an estimated 125 m.p.h. It had disappeared over the Potomac.

At 2:24 p. m. the President was on tv again. There was some commotion at the door of the room from which he was broadcasting. He turned his head and nearly one hundred million people who were jammed before television sets across the nation saw his jaw drop and his eyes bulge slightly with irrepressible awe. In about nine seconds a very curious group walked into camera range. There were half a dozen secret service men with drawn guns, and in their midst, the target of those watchful weapons, was the first of the green horde.

He was—the measurements were determined later—six feet seven and one-half inches tall. He was dressed in a green shirt and trousers, caught around the waist by a

heavy belt on which were stitched a number of cabalistic designs; on the left breast were more of the same, a circle and three slim triangles. In a holster slung at the right side of his belt was a large revolver or pistol. It was what had been known in the old West as a half-breed holster, enabling the wearer to swing up the muzzle and fire the gun without jerking it free of the leather. The alien had his hands folded carefully across his chest. Had he made a single motion toward the gun, he would have been blown in two.

In proportions and frame he was very like a human being. His chest was deep and his legs and arms well muscled. His skin was a delicate, olive-green in hue, as those viewers with color tv could see. His face was normal, perhaps a bit stern in expression, but with the ordinary features of a man, except that he had only one eye. It was located immediately above the bridge of his nose; it was about four times the area of a human eye and almost round in shape, and its small pupil roamed swiftly to and fro as the alien walked slowly toward the President. The pupil of the eye was like a tiny animal in a cage, dashing from side to side, up and down, uncanny, incredible, and horrifying.

THE cameras did not show his feet. These were somewhat like those of an ostrich, each having two enormous toes, naked, horny, and padded with thick layers of green fatty matter on the soles.

The tint of his skin could have been accepted as a mutation of the strictly human animal. The single eye, even, might have suggested a humanoid sport or far-future development. But the feet were utterly inhuman and even the most callous or most unimaginative among the citizens who saw him personally that first day agreed that the feet were terrifying.

The cameras were turned off after about twenty seconds. An announcer came on and spluttered some drivel about keeping cool and not losing our heads, spoiling the effect of these admonitions at once by a piercing, hysterical giggle.

Before a quarter of an hour had elapsed, there were minor riots and demonstrations throughout the continent. The worst of these were sparked by fanatic groups claiming that the end of the world had come. Others, scarcely less violent, went screaming that the Martians were invading us, that the White House had been captured "right on the television" and much more of such idiocies. In many places the militia were called out to suppress

waves of looting and street fighting.

The Air Force, which had not been taken entirely unaware, since they had privately come to the conclusion some time before that the flying saucers were extraterrestrial, now flung a canopy of fighter planes, both jet and motor-driven, over Washington, and, somewhat later, Pittsburgh, Detroit, Birmingham and New York. Chicago, Los Angeles, and other cities of strategic importance were likewise protected within a period of two hours.

The rioting was subdued by evening. Army trucks equipped with public address systems patrolled everywhere, repeating the warnings to keep calm and do nothing until official word was broadcast of our intentions toward the aliens and vice versa. Meanwhile the first of the green horde was given a comfortable room in the Pentagon, where he was kept under an unobtrusive but thorough twenty-four-hour-a-day guard, and where means of communication with him were speedily sought for.

In a matter of a day and a half, or, to be precise, at two minutes to midnight on Sunday the 26th of December, he articulated his first English word. It was "Yes." Shortly he proved that he had absorbed much more than this word, for he began making attempts at complete sentences around 2:00 a.m. on the 27th. He had been under the constant supervision and teaching of a corps of scientists, language experts, and assorted brain-workers; he had shown no desire for sleep during the thirty-six hours he had been on the ground, and had listened to and worked with the teachers all that time. He showed now a good rudimentary grasp of English. It was given as the official opinion that he had shown in this the intelligence of a human genius, although not of the very highest order, rating perhaps an I. Q. of 195.

IN the eight-hour period following this he spoke with the President and assured him, partly in words and partly in signs, that the folk of the green saucers were friendly explorers from a distant galaxy. His voice was throaty and rather unpleasant, with a tendency to crack in the upper registers.

He expressed a desire to return to his saucer for some purpose which he could not make plain with his basic English. This was at 10:17 a.m. on the 27th. It was considered politic to allow him to enter the saucer alone. He did so, by a method which was unfortunately not communicated to the public later. Shortly the craft rose from the earth and shot rap-

idly out of sight in the direction of Mount Vernon. There was no jet exhaust detected in its take-off; it simply rose like an iron filing to a magnet, soundless and abrupt. For three days thereafter there were no reported sightings of saucers.

It was officially decided in this period that the green man with the single eye and bird's feet was not intent on mischief; he had been given an idea of how far we had progressed technically, in many fields, but the information was only what he and his kind could have discovered for themselves in the years'-long surveillance of the world which they must have been making. No secrets had been imparted to him and he had expressed nothing but cordiality and good will, though he had managed to tell the interrogators only a little about himself and his race and home planet, which when boiled down and analyzed came to this: his home was far away (of course it would be) and he was friendly.

After the three-day lapse, saucers were detected on radar screens all over the civilized world: rather too high for the usual reconnaissance, they came and passed in greater numbers than ever before. No planes reported them, their altitude being too great. This long-distance traffic worried the governments of every nation. It was capable of so many explanations that deduction was futile. The protective canopies of fighter planes remained over key cities in the United States and Canada, and to some extent over the capitals and industrial centers of the world.

Eight days after the tremendous influx of saucers, Russia issued her considered opinion. The green one-eyed man was a capitalistic hoax. No such creature existed. The radar blips were "a" natural phenomenon, "b" a secret weapon of the Soviet, "c" a secret weapon of America and or Britain, "d" a capitalistic hoax. Somehow the masters of propaganda made it appear that all four of these silly charges were true, notwithstanding their mutual cancellation.

Two days thereafter the green horde launched its attack, at 11:34 a.m. on Sunday, the 9th of January, 1955.

CHAPTER II

ALTHOUGH the great flights of fighter planes were continually aloft, the reassuring program had gone on, the broadcasting trucks still rumbling about the streets foghorning their messages of cheer and optimism to a somewhat restive public. Some elements of the free press had been

warning direly of "unknown dangers" and "possible treachery"—this causing some gimlet-eyed gentlemen in high places to come out with bills and demands for suppression of a free press for the duration of the so-called negotiations with the alien people. There had been no negotiations whatever. In this case, as in many others, the free press was perfectly right; but their warnings in the face of official hopefulness served only to confuse and fret the public. Hence, the tv lulled, the radio allayed, and the bellowing loudspeakers on the cruising trucks attempted to quiet fear under a blanket of sound.

At the said moment of attack, 11:34 a.m., the green saucers swept down with a perfection of simultaneity that made you think, as someone said later, that the devil had murmured "Synchronize your watches, boys." They hurtled from the skies over New York and Bangkok and Berlin and London and Madrid and Shanghai, down upon Moscow and San Francisco and Tokyo and Paris and Bombay. In the instant that the devastation hit New Orleans it also smashed at Edinburgh and Nome and Minsk and Berne. The first skyscraper toppled in Chicago as the first factory blew to flinders in Rio de Janeiro.

It was curious that their weapons did not seem to include the atomic variety. No A-bombs or H-bombs; rays, of incalculable destructive power and unknown origin, lanced from the diving saucers and struck the earth with the force of exploding bombs, but instead of crashing and then echoing away, these explosions continued, like great rolls of terrible thunder, for as long as the rays were aimed downward. One ray, directed from the belly-port of a canting ship, would set the ground a-shudder, crumple all structures in its path or near it, and create an ear-shattering blast that kept on and on until the saucer, tilting away, shut off the ray. So that each ray, in effect, was like an unending and ever-replenished series of huge bombs—and from each ship came a ray, and over each city there were hundreds of ships . . .

The mighty centers of civilization were obliterated. The great concentrations of population over the globe died. Manufacturing cities and cities which produced nothing of strategic value whatever were smeared indiscriminately into blood and dust and muck. It was an attack, not at man's weapons or production, but at man himself. It was the beginning of man's end, a giant step toward his classification with the dodo, the auk, the sabertooth tiger and the pas-

senger pigeon.

One large eastern city in the United States presented a typical picture during that hour of cataclysm. In the first fifteen minutes its canopy of fighter planes was blown out of the sky; the weapons they carried, some of them atomic, were as effective against the green saucers as slingshots on platinum. By noon the air had begun to fill with billowing, drifting masses of smoke-yellow vapor, reeking of sulphur and molten metal and burnt flesh and death. Those who had been unlucky enough to live through the attack thus far were now so nauseated by the odors of mankind's collapse that they stumbled among the shattering streets, retching and vomiting, as eager to escape the yellow hell-cloud's stink as they were to avoid the crumbling steel and cement.

AT the end of an hour, while the greater part of the two hundred and twenty-eight saucers continued to raze the city, one alien ship made a landing on a leveled field of the suburbs. Its entry port jawed open, somewhat like a huge clamshell parting, and a single green man emerged. He was six feet nine and his eye measured a good four inches across. He carried a flag of red, white and green, on which the device of a circle and three triangles which he wore on his left breast was repeated. He strode away from the ship, gazing about with satisfaction. Some distance off lay the wreckage of a broadcasting truck; its warped, ruined loudspeakers yawned over the body of an Army sergeant, who still held in a firm grip the microphone into which he had been talking when the world was scuttled around him.

On the side of the demolished truck there remained a sign which read DON'T PANIC—THEY'RE FRIENDLY!

There was blood on the sergeant's mouth and forehead and he had bled from the nose. The blood was almost wholly dry now. His eyes were open.

The green conqueror looked at him and grinned. It remains one of the most curious facts of the matter that both mankind and the bird-footed beasts of the green horde expressed amusement and pleasure by turning up the corners of the mouth . . .

The alien peered all about him, shading his eye with his right hand. Nothing moved anywhere except the skimming saucers and the collapsing city. He stepped forward and lifted his pennon high, to plant its ten-foot staff in the dead body

of the earthman. Holding it up, he spoke a few words in his own language, a guttural cracking speech which ranged up and down like that of an excited bird.

As he was about to stab the corpse with his flag, the corpse rolled onto its back and contracted its body, shot up its feet and kicked the alien square in the belly.

Catching the shaft of the flag, the erstwhile dead sergeant jerked it out of the alien's grasp, immediately bounded to his feet, took a firm two-handed grip of the thing —the sharp lance-head made it a splendid weapon—and ran it with savage violence straight into the throat of the green man, who died instantly and without sound.

Pausing only to shake his head once, because it ached fiercely, the sergeant bent over the tall body, folded one big hand around the pistol and its half-breed holster, and yanked. The retaining strap broke. The sergeant turned and began to run in the opposite direction from the grounded saucer, which continued to show no sign of life. Shortly he had disappeared into the smoking, burning ruins of the city's edge.

And so at 12:46 p.m. on January 9th, 1955, a moribund world drew the first blood from its extraterrestrial assassins.

CHAPTER III

TRACE Roscoe had been a sergeant, off and on, for nine years. He belonged to the regular Army and had never thought of choosing any other career. Twice he had been busted to corporal and twice regained his stripes. Once he had been up for a commission and had, after due thought, refused it, because he'd known he wouldn't have it long. He had an Irish temper, and that was from his mother; he had a bulldog English muddle-through determination, and that was from his father. He was a hell of a good man in a fight. He was the best driver in his company, a better mechanic than a driver, and a better boxer than either. He read adventure novels and Von Clausewitz and Spillane and Voltaire and anything else that happened his way. He didn't consider himself much of a brain, but would have smeared the man who implied he was less intelligent than Einstein, for a man opinion of himself should not be held by other people.

He had been driving his broadcasting truck along Highwood Avenue when the saucers attacked. He had been reciting the pap about not panicking, and hoping that he could personally see one of the single-eyed

aliens sometime. He put no faith in the friendly-explorer crud. He wanted to look into that lone eye and decide for himself what the critters intended, because Trace Roscoe fancied himself a pretty good judge of character, even the character of ostrich-hoofed schmoes from outer space.

Well, the earth rose up around him and his truck before he rightly knew what was going on; and after a period of blackness he woke up to pain and a stench like one of Poe's charnel houses in his nostrils. He found that he was lying with his left arm draped over a jagged hunk of truck, clutching the mike with stiff fingers. Not being one to act without thinking in an emergency, he lay perfectly quiet and listened for a while to the rumble and crump of bombs—which he later found out had been the rays from the saucers instead—and the buzzing of his own skull. He could taste blood and feel it drying on his skin. He didn't believe he was at all badly hurt.

A little way from his face there was a busted headlight. He gazed at it a while, collecting his thoughts and opinions, and noticing that an arrangement of the shattered glass and chrome made a quite respectable mirror in which he could see a good deal of what went on behind him. Before he had decided what to do, he saw the saucer come to ground on the blasted field. He played possum and after a bit he saw the greenie come up the rise and stand there glaring around, holding the queer pennon and tipping back the pronged helmet from his eye.

Trace concentrated on holding still until the critter stepped over to him, and then Trace exploded all over the poor bastard, and took away his gun, which he wouldn't be needing any longer, and ran.

He half expected to be popped off by a bullet or a ray or a lord-knew what from the saucer, but he reached the first edge of ruins safely and went to ground like a rabbit. Sitting in an angle of broken wall, he scanned the city. The saucers were engaged in a final mop-up. Trace felt sick. He looked at his town from end to end and he knew there couldn't be a dozen people alive in it. He had no way of knowing what was happening to the rest of the world, but he made some shrewd guesses. He was aware of the incredible number of blips that had been showing up on the radar screens lately. He knew that this city wasn't important enough in the scheme of things to warrant more than a small section of the attacking forces. This must be what Revelations called "the great day of God" when good and

evil fought it out at Armageddon. Except that evil seemed to be winning, hands down.

TRACE Roscoe peeked over his wall at the grounded saucer, and saw that a lot of greenies were coming out of it, advancing cautiously toward their dead comrade who lay with ten feet of flagpole sticking up from his throat. Trace counted them as an automatic action (there were seventeen), in case he would need to know how many made up a saucer's crew in the future. Then he bent low and ran from hillock to hillock through what had that morning been the south-western suburbs of his city. As he ran he discarded the holster of the alien's gun, and thrust the weapon itself into his belt. If he had had a few minutes to examine it, and had he discovered how many loads it carried, he would have remained and started a fight with the one-eyers. Running was strategically correct in view of his ignorance of his only weapon.

When he had covered a mile he got up on a one-story-high mound of rubble and looked back. The green men had planted their flag and returned to their craft; even as Trace watched, it rose like a round green bullet and disappeared above the yellow haze. None of the other saucers landed, so far as he could see. The landing, then, had been for the vainglorious purpose of leaving their banner in token of victory. Trace spat and jumped down and went on into the city.

The reek made him gag now and then, but he had smelled some godawful things in his time and was able to control his uneasy stomach. He considered the possibility of poison gas and judged it too slight to worry over; the destroying rays had certainly no need of accompanying gases, for they were as all-destructive as a thousand hurricanes rolled up in one package.

By three o'clock — his watch, miraculously, was still going— Trace had entered the city itself. He trotted down a broken, heaped-up thoroughfare, his glance roving constantly from side to side in search of movement. A sergeant whose army was gone had to find himself another in a hurry; and if so be it he was the general in that one, well, Trace Roscoe was ready to take on the job.

He had no fanatical hope of beating the greenies, because he was a soldier and level-headed, and odds of some millions to one were no odds at all. He figured the enemy's strength at something between ten and a hundred thousand

saucers, with at least twenty individuals crewing each. There were at a conservative estimate 200,000 troops on the other side; and more like 2,000,000. So Trace was not indulging in any optimism when he started hunting for an army. He was merely following his natural inclinations, which were to fight the opposition as long as he had breath in his body and hands on the ends of his arms.

He was not full of sorrow and wild regret either, for that wasn't Trace's way. Besides which, the destruction of the civilization of this earth was too big to be grasped and understood all at once. If Trace had found the bodies of a score of people, he might have burst into tears, for his heart was big and Irish and sentimental. But pacing down the stinking tomb of hundreds of thousands of men and women was so incredible as to be simply a fact and not a comprehendible horror.

Alone he stood in the middle of a more-or-less flat plain in the city, staring and listening; and when he heard the shout, he went toward it at once, exulting that so quickly he'd discovered a private, or it might be a captain, for his army. There was a hole that was floored with cracked steps and went down into the ground, and Trace dived into it without hesitation.

SITTING at the bottom, with chunks of concrete heaped around him like divot around a duffer's tee, was a thin gentleman in a mustache, half a top hat, one leg of a pair of black trousers, and little else but a scowl. "They killed her," he said as Trace came into his view. "They blew her right out of my arms."

"Can you stand?" Trace asked him, reaching out one big hand.

"I don't know. Ouch! Yes, I can," said the man. "I tell you, they murdered Fannie."

"I'm sorry, fellow. Your wife?"

"My rabbit."

"Rabbit?" Trace turned him around and looked him over for wounds; there were none more serious than extensive bruises.

"I'm a magician," said the naked man. "Blacknight the Great. I had Fannie for three years and she never made a mistake. Smartest damn rabbit you ever saw. I was carrying her to a shelter and one of those rays shot along over the Farinello Building and the whole street blew up and she was gone, just like that. Damn green monsters." He stared at the sergeant. "I suppose it seems silly to you, feeling bad about a rabbit?"

"No," Trace said shortly. "I had a marmoset once. Let's get out of

here and see how many others are alive."

"I haven't heard a thing for an hour," Blacknight said. "Not until your footsteps in the gravel. I think they're all gone." The two men stood in the open, craning their necks. "Nobody," the thin man said bitterly. "Two men left out of a world. We can't even start our race again. That takes a female too. My God," he said suddenly, and put his hands over his face.

"Come on," Trace Roscoe said sharply. "I'm hungry."

The naked magician looked up at him. "In the middle of this?" he said, and then, considering, "I guess I am too. I wouldn't have thought it was possible."

Farther along they found the remains of a two-story department store; a lot of it was gone, but in the mess they managed to find a shirt and a pair of pants for Bill Blacknight—he swore it was his own name—and a couple of cans of corned beef hash. They invented a skillet and stove out of twisted metal, and shortly had wolfed down the hash and were prowling further into the city.

Trace saw the policeman first. He was walking in a tight little circle around a shattered telephone pole, waving his revolver and talking loudly to nobody. Trace sneaked up within a dozen yards before the cop spotted him. The first bullet cut his ear and the second missed, and then Trace had the gun. He tried to subdue the policeman but the poor devil was hopelessly mad. Trace shot him mercifully in the head. He took the cartridges out of the leather belt and dropped them into his shirt pocket and stuck the gun beside the alien's weapon in his belt. He and Bill Blacknight traveled on, going methodically from street to street in search of recruits.

WHEN dusk came they had six more people. Bill told Trace that it was the damn silliest-looking excuse for an army which he could imagine. Trace shrugged. "They're human, anyhow."

"Are you sure?" Bill asked him. "Even Slough?"

"He has two eyes," said Trace, "and that's the only qualification a man needs for my army."

Slough might be called a midget. He stood exactly four feet high. He was beautifully proportioned, smoothly muscled and lithe-looking. He had a large head with a wild mane of yellow hair, and his eyes were pure Delft blue. He spoke in professorial tones and appeared entirely unaffected by the fact that his left arm was broken below the elbow. Trace set it for him, expertly and swiftly, while Slough

talked quietly and with six-syllable words of the ghastly doom he hoped to see visited on the alien destroyers. He said he had been an airplane designer. He was without doubt the most intellectual member of Trace Roscoe's forces, and the only one save Bill Blacknight the magician whom Trace felt he could trust.

There were two girls, red-headed Barbara Skye who had been a secretary and couldn't seem to stop saying how awful, how awful it all was; and a dark-haired woman of twenty-five or so, who had not said a word thus far. Trace believed she was sane, but stunned into a sort of walking coma. He did not therefore consider killing her in mercy, but took her along as a potential ally.

The other three men, all office workers, looked useless; but Trace was setting out to avenge his world, and he had to accept every scrap of manpower that came his way. The three were in various degrees of shock, the worst being Johnson, who wept and shivered if you looked at him, the next Kinkaid, a plump balding man with a bad case of shudders who kept trying to run away from the little band, and the best Hafnagel, almost as big as Trace, with a tic in his cheek and fingers so rigid with nerves as to be almost useless. Johnson had had a rifle when they found him, a heavy sporting thing with four loads that he'd picked up in the rubble of a firearms shop. Trace had taken it from him and given it to Bill. Johnson had been too frightened and sick to protest.

Trace sat them down in a circle on the highest point of what had been the city, where tumbled buildings and upheaved earth made a barren hill which would never produce anything, flowers or homes, for a thousand years . . . He stood among them and began to talk. His manner was that of a sergeant with a detail of raw recruits.

"Okay. There are seven of you and by and large I've seen better material, but you'll have to do. Now I'll tell you what we're going to do. We're going to find the green lice that did this to our country, and blast 'em. We're going to make 'em wish they'd never left Venus, or Mars or wherever the hell they sprang from."

Hafnagel, the big man with stiff hands, said something unprintable. "How, you jerk? How can you fight a flying saucer?"

TRACE gave him a look that in its time had crackled the enamel on the teeth of many a GI, He said slowly, "My name is Sergeant Roscoe and I am your commanding officer and you had bet-

ter remember it, Mac, or you will have cause to wish you had become extinct some years before you ever laid eyes on me. Now I shall continue. The fleet of enemy ships left here at a terrific pace between one and two o'clock this afternoon, heading in the direction of Washington, D.C. I haven't spotted one since. Therefore what we will do is pick up our flat feet and head for the capital. God knows what we'll find there, but it's a cinch we've got to get out of here plenty fast."

"Why?" asked Kinkaid, the fat one.

"For one thing, Mac, they'll not be back this way, because what have they got to come back for?" asked Trace patiently.

"All the more reason to sit right here," said Hafnagel. "We can dig enough out of the ruins to live like kings."

"Ignoring the fact that you are gonna go where I say you're gonna go," said Trace through his teeth, "let me ask you, Mac, to take a sniff of the breeze."

"The smell's bearable."

"It will get worse. By this time two days from now it'll be enough to suck the guts out of you. I needn't say why."

"Oh," said Hafnagel, his cheek twitching. "Oh, I hadn't thought—"

"Exactly. Don't try to. Just listen to me. I am your superior officer, Mac," said Trace, "and with you and these other slewfooted remnants I am going to put a crimp in them Martians—*those* Martians —that they'll feel clean to the GHQ. Now we'll take ten and be on our way. I want to clear this area before the atmosphere gets serious."

He looked at them, seven shivering people huddled from the cold into the coats, scarves and parkas they had managed to snatch before their universe had erupted into nothingness. Despair was unknown to Trace Roscoe, but a grin of wonder touched his mouth; wonder at his own temerity. He was leading these poor reluctant untrained slobs against a million or two giant bird-footed interplanetary warriors, and with about nine-tenths of his mind he expected to do some damage to them. The other tenth said to him, with the voice of his grandmother, "Och, Trace boy, it's mad you are, mad clean through to your Irish bones."

"Wirra, Grandmither," Trace said to her in his head, "it's the bloody English in me too, d'ye see, that won't let me stop sluggin' and won't admit I can be whupped; and then there's all the American of me, and ye know fine that an American never is whupped at all, at all!"

He chuckled — first time that day—and sat down to examine the alien's pistol by the flare of his lighter.

CHAPTER IV

THERE was a good-enough moon. They made the outskirts of the city by eleven o'clock. A restaurant, all but demolished, gave them canned food; Trace had to bat Johnson in the chops to keep him from wolfing down a dirty chicken sandwich he found lying on the floor, and Johnson went into a fit of wailing hysterics, but when he came out of it he was just about cured, and didn't weep or shiver any longer. They walked a little farther and at midnight Trace plunked them down on a wooded hill, beyond the rayed area. He and Bill Blacknight gathered dry brush and built a blazing fire against the chill of January.

"Dangerous?" queried Slough, the tiny man.

"Calculated risk," said Trace. "I think we can presume the saucers won't be over this sector for a while, and if they do come, they may believe it's a natural fire. The main reason is to attract survivors to us." He didn't mention that he himself was so inured to climatic changes he would never have thought of building a fire for warmth, save for the others. He wore his heavy shirt and trousers and over them a light topcoat Bill had found for him. He could not have said off-hand whether he was cold or comfortable.

When they had all gone to sleep, some like corpses and others as light-slumbering as wildcats, Trace walked a beat around them, keeping an eye and an ear open for approaching steps. There were none.

Toward morning he heard the dark girl sobbing. He sat beside her and stroked her hair soothingly. When Bill took the watch, Trace fell asleep with one arm over the girl's shoulders. At dawn she was all right, and could talk again.

Her name was Jane Kelly and she'd been a teacher, and Trace considered her a very fine-looking dish indeed, even in the fat parka. She was not so flamboyantly female as Barbara Skye, the redhead, but she was distinctly not the sort you would take for a boy at forty paces. She had curves and a warm face and eyes like brown gold, if there was such a thing.

Trace said "Yo," like John Wayne was always doing in those Old West pictures about the cavalry. "Let's travel." They tramped off toward Washington.

They never reached it. They never even got as far as Philadelphia.

THE first trouble came as they were crossing a field of frozen mud and corn-stalk stubble; Barbara turned her ankle and sat down with a squawk. She was wearing high heels, not spikes but a good two-and-a-half inches, and Trace was disgusted with himself for neglecting his job. He was so full of vengeance and hatred that he forgot to check on the little things that could sabotage him. He should have scrounged some shoes for her somewhere yesterday.

He glanced at Jane's feet. She wore sensible shoes. They didn't improve her ankles any, but they couldn't spoil them either. Trace had never been an admirer of sensible shoes, yet now he felt a rush of affectionate gratitude to Jane for wearing them.

"You can't go barefoot," he said to Barbara, who was chattering petulantly and rubbing her ankle, exposing an astonishing length of silken thigh in the process. "And you can't travel in those things. You'll have to be carried."

"Why don't you leave her?" said Kinkaid, the plump man. "She's no use to you. Neither am I. I'll stay with her."

Barbara said venomously, "I'd as soon be stranded with one of those bird-footed weirdies as with you, Tubby. Take your cotton-pickin' eyeballs off my leg before I scratch them out for you."

Hafnagel, the big man, said, "Take a vote, Roscoe. You can't force us to limp all over creation with you. Because you're crazy enough to want to find the saucers is no—"

"I'm no soldier," said Johnson. He was a blond man with a crooked nose and jughandle ears. "I'm going to take to the hills. The aliens are invincible; but a man might avoid them for years in the hills. There's farms and such to live off."

"Don't think I'll go with you," said Barbara, standing up. "I wouldn't trust one of you creeps if Roscoe was out o' sight. I'm going with him if I have to walk on my palms."

"We're not splitting up," said Trace. "Someone's got to carry you, honey." His breath misted out on the frosty air. "Hafnagel, you're big enough."

Hafnagel knelt down. Barbara straddled his shoulders, the man took her ankles carefully in his stiff fingers, as impersonally as if they had been firewood, rose and started forward. "Hey," Barbara said, "this is okay. You can see from up here."

"Any saucers?" asked Trace.

"No. Nothing moving at all." They all went on.

Trace's troubles multiplied

through the day. Of all his crew, only three were interested in cracking back at the destroyers—the midget Slough, the magician Blacknight, and the teacher Jane Kelly. Barbara was against his plan, but would not leave Trace, whose uniform gave her a sense of security. The three others fought him constantly, with words and sometimes with action.

Hafnagel tried to knock him out during a halt. Trace presented him with a bloody nose, and saddled him with Barbara and drove them all onward.

Johnson broke for cover when they passed a willow-bordered river. Trace caught up with him and washed his face in the icy current, and Johnson restricted himself to verbal attacks thereafter.

Kinkaid refused to budge from their noon camp. Trace grabbed his left ankle and dragged him over the hard rocky earth for twenty yards, and Kinkaid shrieked that he'd walk. Later he pretended to go lame, fooled Trace into half-carrying him for a mile, and then had his fat face slapped so hard that he was filled with respect for Trace's authority, and made no more trouble.

THOSE were the intentional oppositions. Trace had likewise to contend with recurrent hysterics, with terrible fits of moaning agony of mind, and with a depression that now and again settled over the entire company. He bellowed at them, shoved them around, occasionally patted them like dogs; he realized what they were going through, and he was not a callous man, but he knew he had to keep them on the move for their own sakes as well as that of his plan. Civilization had all but died yesterday. He couldn't expect to pick up a gang of hard, angry, level-headed companions. He had to make do with what he had, and improve on this weak raw material by his tough, high-handed methods.

Again and again he examined the strange firearm he'd taken from that green beast with the flag. It baffled him. There was no place to load the thing, no jointure in all its smooth dark surface. The muzzle was pierced by a hole about a millimeter wide. That was where the missile would come out; but could the weapon be reloaded there? What kind of ammo would go into a millimeter opening?

The pistol—he decded to call it that — was much lighter than a Colt of comparable size. There was a narrow trigger and trigger guard in the same position as on an earth-made revolver. That was logical, as the hands of the aliens were, barring the color, perfectly

human. Trace decided he'd have to take a chance and fire the thing. The unchancy weapon would come in handy if he could work it. He bit his lip. Maybe it had just one shot. Oh, blazes. He had to find out.

On their next halt, he aimed it at a tree (there was no sight and he aimed by feel, like a gunman) and pulled the trigger. It had a hard pull, so hard that only a strong man could have budged it at all. It made no sound. There was a thin streak of green light, and the trunk of the tree commenced to smoke and steam. Then it burst into yellow-green flame and exploded, fragments of bark and splintered wood showering out to a great distance. Trace ducked, let up on the trigger, and the beam died. He was reasonably sure now that it wasn't a one-shot.

"And that's what you want us to go against," said Johnson. "A million Martians armed with those. What right have you to make us?" he shrieked. "What authority?"

"This authority," said Trace, hefting the pistol. "Likewise the supreme authority of the United States Army, as I have declared martial law. And then there's the authority of me, Sergeant Trace Roscoe, who will mop up this whole damn valley with your fat puss if so be it you are disinclined to obey my orders, buster."

"Thinks he's so tough," grumbled Kinkaid.

But they all followed Trace when he marched on. Jane Kelly kept up easily with the men, and Trace was especially proud of her; but he had to admit that most all of them were whipping into shape better than he'd any right to hope for. "Few more days and I'll have me a real fine belly-achin' fighting-mad platoon here," he said to himself.

Unfortunately he didn't have a few more days. He made contact with the green-skinned destroyers no more than half an hour thereafter.

CHAPTER V

THEY lay on the crest of a hill. Before them was a rolling plain spotted with patches of old snow. A thousand yards from the base of the hill was a small town, with figures moving among the houses. It had not been blasted by the saucers, but Trace's people did not run down the slope toward it, because along that plain from horizon to horizon rested a line of the great green spacecraft; and the moving figures, there was little doubt, had olive skin and horny bird-feet and a single eye apiece.

"Reconnoiter," breathed Trace.

"Got to know what's what. That place must be local GHQ, and they look dug in pretty solid. I'm going down after dark and give 'em a squint. I'll take Bill with me, in case I want to bring back souvenirs."

"I'm rather more insignificant in the dark than he," said Slough quietly. "And you ought to have three on the party."

"Your arm would slow you down."

"It would not," said Slough firmly. Trace looked at him and after a moment shrugged. "You're right, I could use another." He took the sporting rifle from Bill and gave it to Jane Kelly. He offered the revolver to Slough, who refused it; he handed it to Bill, keeping the alien's pistol for himself. Then he drew the teacher off a short distance. "Look, miss," he said earnestly, "I want you to keep these inter-office-memo types waiting here for me if you can. I don't expect you to actually shoot 'em, but maybe the rifle will cow 'em some. They aren't what you'd call blood and guts sort."

"Why don't you let them go?" she asked suddenly. "What good will three cowards do for you?"

"You never know. I figure they are human, and in the long run they'll show it. Hafnagel is the best—if he has time to recover. He lost his wife in the city."

Jane said, "I was lucky. I hadn't anyone to lose. Except mankind."

Trace looked at her steadily. "At another time, Miss Kelly," he said, "I'd like to tell you what a hell of a fine female you are. I know it wouldn't mean anything to you now, but I must say you are one swell dish." Then he blushed all over his big hawk-nosed face, and turned abruptly to the saucer-cut plain.

In the first darkness the three of them crawled over the top and headed down the slope.

THE greenies kept no guard of any kind on their headquarters town; nor, so far as Trace could see, did they set a sentinel over their saucers. They were horribly sure of themselves, sure of having crushed the highest race on this planet. The night was nearly black, thick jetty clouds obscuring the moon, and stabs and splashes of orange light showed where the aliens walked. The three earthmen made their way to the edge of town, took a road straight toward the center, and trotted down the sidewalk past silent houses. They were cautious, but even so they nearly ran into a greenie who came round a corner not twenty yards ahead. They went to earth

under a hedge and watched him walk by. The orange illumination was explained: from the front of the helmet he wore, a beam of strong undiffused, red-yellow light shot out and down, showing him the path as he walked with bent head. Luckily he did not flick it from side to side, or he must have seen them crammed under the hedge.

When his soft padding footsteps had died, the midget Slough said urgently, "Trace, do you intend capturing one?"

"I might at that. Why?"

"If you do, remove his helmet at once. Immediately!" His breath mingled frostily with Bill's and Trace's. "The triple prongs atop the helmet may be antennae, for radiating and receiving waves, either of thought or a form of radio. It may be thus that they communicate, so knock off the helmet at once if you attempt a capture, or if we're discovered."

"You are a shrewd cookie," said Trace thoughtfully. "Okay, will do. Now let's get the lead out."

The town had been a small place, with one drug store, one theater, half a dozen stores. The men prowled all round the heart of it, and Trace said, "Here's something funny. They haven't shown any curiosity—the theater's still locked up tight, like it must have been on Sunday when the attack was made on the cities. How come? Don't they want to check on what a building like this is used for? They don't seem to have pried into much of anything."

"Maybe they're not interested in us," said Bill. "Maybe they don't give a whoop for what we've done and how we've progressed. What if they considered themselves so superior to us that they thought we had nothing to teach them? Then they wouldn't pry into our heritage and culture. They'd just obliterate us."

"And why bother to obliterate us?" asked Slough.

"Lot of answers to that," said Trace briefly. "Meanness, desire for sense of power, what have you. Let's nail one and drag tail." He led them past the movie house, and gestured at an orange light approaching. "That one."

"Don't forget the helmet," urged Slough.

"Take it easy, Mac," said Trace huskily. They went to ground behind evergreen shrubs on the lawn of a funeral parlor.

The tall creature neared them, his horny feet with their heavy pads making little noise on the cement. He passed, and Trace launched himself at the broad back, feeling joy wash through him in a heady wave at the first action

since his attack on the flag-planter. He struck the alien with all the weight and power of his two hundred pounds, expecting it to pitch forward on its face. It did nothing of the sort. It staggered one step, stiffened, whirled on him. He clutched wildly for a grip, but the stonewall character of this great beast had thrown off his timing. The thing hit him in the face with a forearm. Trace reeled back and fell into a pine tree.

BILL Blacknight leaped on the one-eye even as Trace was hurled away, and darting up one long arm, the magician hit the helmet with the tips of his fingers. In a flash the dexterous hand found the edge of the metal and flipped upward; the alien, squawking, reached for the headgear, just too late. It clanged on the sidewalk. Bill wrapped himself around the steel-tough torso. He knew nothing of brawling, but he was as slippery as an oiled eel. The green man groped for him and he was somewhere else. Terrible hands groped to tear his head from his body, and Bill was a human cummerbund, folded around the waist of the thing and punching desperately for a vulnerable spot. Then he had flattened up along its back and had a half-nelson on the thick throat.

The greenie drew his weapon. Bill did a contortionist trick and booted it out of his hand.

Trace climbed out of the pine tree, swearing bluely.

Slough appeared just before the alien, who tensed his arms to grip the tiny man. Slough was no more than three feet off, well within reach and full in the glare of the fallen helmet's lamp; yet the one-eyed marauder did not catch him. Bill had forced him to his knees. The huge round eye glared across at Slough, while the thing appeared to wait for something unguessable to happen. Slough swung his good arm and caught the brute a healthy crack on the jaw. With a bird's cry, high and ferocious, like the wail of an eagle who has sighted on a rabbit and seen it turn into a wolf, the greenie jerked his head back and staggered to his two-toed feet.

Trace came in like Joe Louis at Tony Galento. He put a fist into the rigid belly and it smashed in like so much well chewed bubble gum. Then he pasted the alien in the throat, pulling his punch just enough so as not to shove the spine through the nape of the neck. Last, as the alien was toppling over, he unleashed the left uppercut which had won him seventy bouts in two years. The

greenie flipped up his face and stared sightlessly at the black sky for an instant, whereafter he crumpled into a heap that would never get up and walk away under its own power if it lay there till the crack of doom.

The three friends panted a little at each other.

"Swell captive you have there," said Bill at last. "A lot he'll tell you, Sarge. I heard eighteen distinct bones bust when you biffed him that last one."

"Have to catch another," said Trace irritably. "Damn!"

"And here it comes, at the double," said Slough.

A light bobbed a block away. Bill gestured at the fallen helmet. "Look at that, a regular searchlight." The beam was reaching up to flicker on low-hanging clouds. Its source of power must be startlingly potent. Trace picked up the helmet and settled it on his own head, where it dropped and rested heavily on his ears. He stepped behind a maple tree between sidewalk and street. "Out of sight," he growled at the others.

THE second alien slowed, walked briskly, faltered, stopped. He called out a couple of questioning syllables in the avianlike tongue. Trace came out from behind the tree and shot the orange beam directly into the single great eye. In the second's grace he thus achieved, he stepped up to the creature and clipped it sharply, competently, on the button.

"That does it," he said with satisfaction. "We got it made."

He knelt, removed the helmet, passed it to Slough. Then he took off the one which he himself wore and gave it to Bill. "Toss them someplace where the light won't show. Can't mess around trying to turn 'em off — and they might be a couple of booby-traps. Broadcasting stations with brims, that'd lead the enemy right to us." He heaved up at the greenie's middle. He whooshed with surprise. "Little help, Bill," he grunted. "This thing weighs about three hundred!"

With the magician's aid he stood up, holding the alien over one shoulder. He looked toward the invisible hill; he was thinking of Jane Kelly. It doesn't matter a damn about the others, he thought, not even the girl Barbara; but that little teacher with the sensible shoes . . .

They went up to the theater and turned the corner and there ahead of them were many ducking, bobbing orange lights. A ragged line of aliens were approaching the town, had already cut them off from the hill. They ran, Trace heavily with the inert weight on his

shoulder, and there were more coming at them from the other side, so that their only escape lay through an alley that ran beside the theater. Down this they pounded, Trace cursing the helmets which must have shot out warning signals when they were removed; the aliens were coming too fast and purposefully for it to be accidental.

The alley debouched into another, but this was spotted at the ends by more head-lamps. Bill felt a cold touching him that was deeper and more icy than the January wind. He said, "The movie's the last bet," and jumping to the back exit of the place, he performed a swift sleight-of-hand that every magician knows of, and the lock swung open, the hasp flipping back from the staple. He pulled at the door, Slough crept into the blackness, and Trace, still carrying the unconscious greenie, followed. Bill closed the door behind him. It was possible that the extraterrestrial marauders did not know the principle of the padlock, of course; in which case they might not notice the unlocked door. But Bill rather doubted it. So did Trace.

CHAPTER VI

TRACE carried the feebly stirring alien along the aisle of the deserted theater, the others following behind him. He went up the stairs to the balcony and found the entrance to the projection booth; negotiated those narrow steps and dumped his captive unceremoniously on the floor between the two big projectors.

"No lock," said Bill, examining the door.

"The place is a trap," said Trace irritably. "Damn it . . . but there wasn't anyplace else to go." He knelt and rolled the green man onto his back and slapped his face hard. The alien opened his great eye dazedly, stared round at the three earthlings, and croaked, "What occur?"

"English!" gasped Bill.

"Sure," said Trace. "I expected it. Their emissary learned it and must have broadcast it to 'em while he was being taught. The helmets, the helmets. It's logical."

"Chwefft is told English," said the green man, "we talk English all." He put a hand to his head, and his tight mouth was drawn open into an oval of surprise. "Hat?" he said uncertainly.

"The first one beamed it to the fleet," agreed Slough. "That makes our job easier."

"How?" asked Bill.

"Knowledge, boy, the acquiring of knowledge."

The green man made as if to

get up. Trace shoved him back. The creature came away from the floor at him like an enraged panther, striking up with little skill but immense strength at his head and chest. Trace dodged through the perfunctory guard and belted him on the nose, then, as his struggles merely increased, let him have a left cross high on the cheek, just grazing the rim of the eye. The alien cringed and held up his hands in supplication.

"Lousy fighter," said Bill.

"If you think so, I'll time the two of you for a couple rounds," said Trace savagely. "He's scared of his eye being touched; it must be sensitive as hell. Besides, we've got two of those pistols of theirs now, and he's no fool."

"Allow go," said the man on the floor. "Not keep."

"First you talk," said Trace, trying to keep basic English. "How many of you are there?"

"How many? Ah," the thing said, giving a curious one-eyed frown. He had no hair on his head and only a bald ridge for an eyebrow. "*How many* indicating number?"

"That's right."

"Not knowing word for how many. More than you," he said, "more on voyage than you, and more more at home."

"Home? Where's home?"

"The system Lluagor, home planet Chwosst," said the other, sitting up cautiously and clasping his knees. He smiled. His expression said clearly, If these insignificant mites want to question me, what harm can it do? Trace, fighting a surge of Irish rage, went on.

Bill prowled over to the openings that showed the deserted theater, squinting through the gloom. They had turned on the lights in the projection booth, and that worried him, for the searchers might come in below at any minute. He found the house lights and threw them on, so that the booth would not glow a warning. Thank heaven the power plant's still working, he thought. As Trace hammered at the green man with questions, Bill began tinkering with the machines.

BIRD-FOOT was saying, in his unpleasant tones, "How many saucers about twenty to forty thousand, this worked out by our mathematicians Chwefft and Hlamnig after learning your system of numbers. Interesting primitive system without knowing sub-space and lacking even name for *fpiolhesit.*"

"Sub-space!" exclaimed Slough, darting forward until he stood directly before the alien. "How did he learn the name for that concept, I wonder? But it makes sense.

Certainly it would seem logical that such an advanced race would have conquered the mathematically-conceived sub-space, in order to travel interdimensionally from galaxy to galaxy. How else could they go distances that even at light's speed would take a portion of eternity?"

The green man eyed Slough, his head cocked. "Intelligent," he croaked. "Come closer." He reached out a finger that was crooked as if to beckon, bumped it against Slough, and recoiled, an expression of dismay fleeting over his hard features. Then the olive-green skin smoothed out. "Ah. Small, small man. Not know."

"You got a looney," said Bill.

"He's not crazy," said Trace. "I had that sort of figured out before." He left the subject as Bill frowned at him, quite uncomprehending, and said to the alien, "What do you want here?"

"Your planet."

The words were rasped out without emotion, but they were as cold as the wind of January that played outside the theater. Trace said, "Why?"

"Need worlds. Chwosst long ago full, more worlds needing." He labored ahead, perfectly in command of the English he knew, seeking now and again for words beyond his ken, substituting others that were yet clear to the enthralled listeners. For five minutes he talked, and eight and ten, to the three humans in the projection booth; outside his bird-footed, one-eyed compatriots padded the empty town, whose inhabitants they had eliminated with the handguns that morning, down to the last dog and canary. Now they had found the dead alien and the two helmets, now they sought those who squatted in the theater; beyond the town lay the ravaged country, and across its face stretched the lines of thousands upon thousands of quiescent green saucers, some spied on by other survivors of humanity, others proud in a total destruction wrought by their all-shattering rays. Of all of this Trace Roscoe was aware, and still the story of the captive green man pinned him without movement to the closing trap of the theater. Once he thought of Jane Kelly. This thought he battled down, because Trace Roscoe was engaged in a war, and he couldn't have any personal dreams at all . . .

Gradually the queer speech of the world-assassin painted the portrait of his race, his mission, and his egocentric soul.

CHAPTER VII

SO long ago that there were no words for the incredible peri-

od of time that lay between then and now, the planet Chwosst, fourteenth from the sun Tsloahn in the star system Lluagor, had become overcrowded to the point of danger. The dominant race of Chwosst were the two-toed one-eyed green men who called themselves Graken, which signified The Mighty, or All-Consuming. The other races of life on the planet were insignificant, small rodent-like beasts used for food by the Graken, who were wholly carnivorous.

They conquered the principles of space travel and sent out fleets of ships — these early craft were bullet-shaped, much as the designers of the first potential rockets of Earth had shaped their creations —and within a hundred-year space they had perfected these so that travel was negligibly dangerous. In their own system they had discovered one other planet capable of supporting their kind. This had given them a long breathing space, during which they hammered at the locked gates of the sub-space corridors. The Graken bred fast, though, too fast, and their two planets filled up before they had solved interdimensional travel.

There followed a long spell of civil war, revolutions that cut their numbers down fantastically and at last came near to exterminating the Graken entirely. While they were repopulating their double homelands, they made a peace among themselves that was never again broken. To assure it, they invented the headgear which broadcast their thoughts, and in a generation or two they had become a kind of ant horde, billions of individuals conditioned to a kind of community thought, a way of life in which every idea of every individual was passed on to those near him, shared and refined amongst so many thousands that a giant race-mind at last made its appearance, and no single Graken ever felt that *he* had conceived anything, but that *they* had done it.

This conjoint cerebration did not reach through space from planet to planet, and so the single-mindedness of the Graken was kept on its track by constant emissaries from one half of the race to the other.

Now a new terror arose for them: the rodents on which they had fed, a breed of beast even more amazingly fertile than the Graken themselves, were decimated by a plague; and nourishment became so scarce that extinction was threatened. Of course there were no rich and poor among the Graken, no money and no privilege, any more than there would

be among a queenless ant tribe. So as one grew hungry, they all did. They might have fed half their people and let the other half starve, but that was not the Graken way.

Now, at this most crucial time of their history, the secret of sub-space was finally discovered, and the relatively simple manner of intratime interstellar journeying ascertained.

Patrols were sent out in the old-style bullet-craft, but due to a lack of manual maneuverability in entering and leaving the galaxies now opened to them, the casualties were nine ships out of each ten sent out from Chwosst. Even so, another habitable planet was found within a matter of a few Earth-months, and food (composed of the "inferior races" found thereon) brought back to the hungry system of Lluagor.

THE saucer-shaped spacecraft were developed and fleets, so numerous that each of the three worlds became hardly more than a vast landing-ground, were built. Two of every three able-bodied male Graken were trained as pilots, navigators, technicians and attack-masters. Patrols of from ten to fifty thousand ships left the base planets regularly, cutting through dimensions of sub-space in a search for new worlds that was of necessity haphazard, and yet which regularly discovered habitable globes in the limitless reaches of the universe.

No instruments had ever been developed by the Graken with which to ascertain the facts about a planet from a distance greater than a few thousand miles. Thus, to check on size, gravity, atmosphere, animal life and so forth, the patrols were forced to scan a world from just beyond its limit of attraction. One possible haven out of each hundred thousand planets checked was an excellent average, one in half a million more than usual. Some worlds accepted were smaller, with less gravity, others had certain differences atmospherically; but the Graken were an adaptable breed, and readily conformed to such changes.

The one male Graken in three who was not taken for saucer duty became a shepherd, a breeder of food animals, or a scientist.

The females bred and raised their offspring and bred again; their fertile life extended over the years from fourteen to eighty-five, their gestation period was four months. The race was prolific . . . The need for worlds was continually urgent.

And Terra was an almost perfect duplication of the Graken's prototype home planet.

The last development in the Graken's marauding through the reaches of space was the actual kidnapping of the new worlds, the theft of entire planets and their transportation through sub-space into the star system Lluagor.

This had been conceived and perfected only a few generations before. The chain of Graken-inhabited globes had reached the sum of fifty-three, and travel between them had become tedious, arduous, and sometimes dangerous, for the ships used for ordinary traveling were fewer and of older patterns than the patrol vessels. The Graken found their communal minds drifting into widened channels, as direct contact became less and less. The pressing need was for a single system of worlds ranged about one star, in which travel would be easy and frequent. They therefore devised the kidnapping principle.

First every planet unfit for Graken life in the system Lluagor was exploded, leaving only two balls spinning about the sun Tsloahn. Then, one by one, the new Graken planets were brought through sub-space and dropped into the home system. This was done by a method which could not be made completely clear by the captive green man; the basic idea of which, however, was easy to comprehend:

A PATROL of no less than 20,000 saucers was brought within a mile of the world's surface. They hovered in lines, opened file, linked up until the planet was girdled by one continuous belt of ships. On a planet of the Earth's circumference, this would be about one saucer per mile. The ships were connected electronically in series, and at a button's push, a lever's throw, or a dial's setting in the control vessel, the saucers together with the captive world were shot through sub-space and into the system Lluagor, where they were fixed in an orbit around the parent star Tsloahn. The saucers then drew off, and the Graken owned another world, a new home for their waxing, fruitful hordes.

After two failures, in which planets already crawling with millions of Graken blew up while entering sub-space, the method of annexation was perfected and the remaining forty-nine planets were added to the first two, Chwosst and Csenfar, in the home system. Later acquisitions were brought to the base after any intelligent native races had been crippled or annihilated, and there, in the comfort and convenience of their own spaceways, the Graken mopped them up and settled on them, keeping alive any species that made acceptable food.

The journey through sub-space and the orbit-fixing did not affect the atmosphere or inhabitants of the planets in any way.

Thus far, no humanoid (or Grakenoid) races had been found in all the explored universe. The possibility of humans as Graken-food was left undiscussed. Cannibalism, even of this off-beat kind, might be repugnant to the green folk, even though race-murder, of a second-cousin breed like Man, was not.

The patrol fleets were not in touch with their home base, as communication through sub-space was impossible. This was established by repeated questioning of the alien prisoner, whose name was an approximation of the syllable Glodd.

Only chance had brought the patrol to the Solar system. It was so far from Lluagor, even by the dimension-cutting sub-space, that it might never have been found except for an accident in their navigation.

Terra had been conquered and ravaged and would now be kidnapped because of a slip of an alien finger on an unknown instrument panel!

CHAPTER VIII

"WELL," said Trace, sucking in his breath, "there *is* some hope."

"Where?" asked Bill Blacknight with deepest woe.

"Tell you later. Did I hear something out there?"

Bill jumped to the apertures and peered into the lighted theater. "There are half a dozen of 'em coming up the aisle," he said. "We are sunk."

"Not yet. What's that film on the reels there? Is it the main feature or a short?"

Bill gave him a glance that said he was out of his head, but obediently pulled the negative out a little and squinted sideways at it. "Feature. All ready to run. You want to entertain these lousy green hellions, Trace?" He shook his head. "My Lord, of all films to show 'em. *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich.* I saw that eight years ago, and it stunk then—about three-fourths of it's old newsreel clips."

"I know, I saw it," said Trace impatiently. "I noticed the marquee outside and I've been thinking . . . can you work one of those gadgets? Those cameras?"

"The projector? Hell, yes. I can do anything in show business. You want sound too?" Bill, mystified, was trying to take orders without thinking about them.

"Yeah. Better start now, I want that ready to run as soon as we

get a lot of greenies inside." As Bill began working over the projector, Trace scowled and did his best to remember the Grade C thriller he'd been conned into seeing so long ago. If only he was right about the opening scene! Slough, at the view-holes, said, "They're crowding in. The lights must suggest our presence."

"Get the show on the road," snapped Trace. He stood up; and the alien Glodd, seized the opportunity, rose as though he were spring-propelled and leaped for the stairs that led to freedom. Trace snatched at him, snarling; the Graken hit him with the flat of one big hand and Trace was hurled clear across the tiny room and into a stack of film cans. The one-eye slammed open the door and vanished down the steps, croaking like a buzzard in pain.

"Roll it!" yelled Trace at Bill. "Roll it! And throw up the sound as loud as you can, or we're stew for their supper tonight!"

The ten seconds were an eternity; then it was suddenly a chaos of noise in the theater, a crash of artifical thunder breaking out of nowhere to engulf the startled green men who choked the aisles and searched among the seats of main floor and balcony. Even in the projection booth, where the sound was muffled, the effect was that of some dreadful cataclysm. The thunder merged into a titanic roll of many military drums, and Trace barked, "House lights down!" but Bill Blacknight, the old showman, had already flicked them low.

On the screen appeared a countryside, through which a broad highway cut straight from the camera's position. Far down the road something moved, growing slowly and menacingly as the drums tattooed. The aliens were held petrified, staring with their great single eyes at the panoramic screen and the black and white picture thereon. Even Glodd had halted at the foot of the booth's steps, gazing immobile across the heads of his closest companions, all laved and assaulted by the strange burst of sound.

TRACE stood in the open door, looking at their erstwhile prisoner. Glodd was their worst danger for the moment. There was no telling how much of their conversation about the movie he could have understood; yet even if he'd grasped none of it, he was still the only Graken who knew where they were — and he was not stupid. Trace had one of the ray pistols in his hand. Risking everything, he centered it on Glodd and hauled back the stiff trigger.

Glodd puffed into steam and fire

without a sound.

Not one greenie turned his head to see. Not an eye flickered from the giant screen.

Trace prudently shut the door, and jumped for the nearest aperture to watch the movie unroll. Bill had managed to lift the volume of the film even higher, and like a hymn to pandemonium, a paean of ear-shattering vociferance, the drums roared from the screen. Now the movement on the two-dimensional roadway was closer, and the front ranks of countless marching soldiers could be seen. It was an old film clip, taken in Germany at least seventeen years before: Hitler's legions, goose-stepping grandly toward the cameras of a world then—however uneasily—at peace. The soldiers grew, widened, shot higher as they neared. The drums remained like endless thunder, and with them there now lifted the for-long-hateful marching song of the Third Reich.

The green men broke. They fled toward the front of the theater, croaking and squawking, and without doubt their thought-radiating helmets flung the fear and panic from one to another, filling the hall and passing through space and metal into the lines of saucers that lay across the continent and the world. At the front door they were jammed into a struggling mass; someone with a hold on himself thought of using his pistol on the locks, and the wave of green erupted into the dark street.

There was no firing at the screen. The soldiers there had grown to quadruple human size. "Giants!" whispered Bill to himself. "They think they're giants!" Then aloud, over the racket from the screen, he said to Trace, "It's like those natives of India or wherever the hell it was, who fan out of the movie houses to get away from the locomotives that were ramming out at 'em from—"

"It's better than that," said Trace. Once more Bill felt that the sergeant wasn't telling something he knew; but again he shrugged and let it go. Trace was a smart boy and what happened from now on was up to him.

The Graken in the balcony had all tumbled and hurtled to the bottom; the last few stragglers were pounding across the small lobby, uttering their birdlike cries of fear. The German Army was enormous on the screen, now their bootsoles showed huge in the goose-step, now the song and the drums were almost unbearably stentorian. Trace Roscoe grinned widely as the first letters of the title and credits flashed out to an empty house. "Come on," he yelled, "hop to it, you two. I'd guess we have

ten minutes to clear this town, before the saucers rip in after the bunch of Goliaths we unleashed on 'em." He laughed as they made for the steps. "First time the Nazis ever did anything good for anybody!"

CHAPTER IX

THEY did get free of the town, but only just in time. The saucers came in very low, over the heads of the scurrying men, and the rays that lanced out of their bellies were phosphorescing yellow-green. They struck first at the theater, from which until that instant Trace could still hear the roaring of the sound track; then they began leveling the place from end to end, and if their weapons had been atomic, explosive, or any other known military projectile short of a javelin, then the fleeing humans would have died in their tracks. As it was, they were knocked off their feet time after time, were flung headlong to pick themselves up bruised and shaken. But close as the rays came, the men suffered neither concussion nor burns.

Sergeant Trace Roscoe admired the things from his viewpoint as a professional soldier. They were the ultimate weapon if you wanted to destroy an objective without any after-effects, or if you had a pinpointed target you had to smash individually from its surroundings. The rays annihilated anything they touched, dissolving metal, pulverizing stone, boring even into the ground beneath, while leaving everything beyond the vaporized area inviolate. The Graken were some boys at the scientific business.

Some distance from the town they found it easier going, as the vibrations of the earth were less. They scrambled up the slope of the hill and stood together at its crest, watching the town disappear in green smoke and yellow flame. Then Trace heard, faint yet plain, a sharp cough among the greater noises. Rifle shot! He oriented himself fast, and ran in the cold darkness toward the place where he'd left Jane Kelly with four others and a rifle. For the first time the soldier in him was unimportant, the mission of revenge forgotten, while Trace Roscoe worried over a girl.

He needn't have fretted. She stood squarely on her excellent legs, cradling the heavy gun in two fine long hands, an expression of utter determination on her beautiful face; and opposite her in the murky night sat Johnson and Kinkaid and Barbara Skye, moving nothing but their mouths. Jane, oblivious to Trace's approach, was

saying, "Wiggle a foot, anybody who wants it blown off . . . "

Trace quietly laid an arm over her shoulders, and despite her control she jumped; he said, "Good girl. Damn fine girl." It was the only speech of love he'd ever made, and it didn't sound quite as strong as he'd wanted, but she smiled up at him with relief and maybe a bit of affection in those dark eyes. "I lost Hafnagel," she said then. "I'm sorry, Trace."

"It's okay. Did you kill him?" He saw nothing incongruous in that idea. She blinked and said, "No. I shot to stop him but he dodged out of sight."

"The saucers," squealed Johnson. "They're attacking us."

"They don't know you're alive, Mac. They're smashing the Nazi Army." And he was damned if he'd explain *that* crack, he thought. "Now listen to me," he went on, talking in his sergeant's voice to these reluctant recruits. "We don't have any too much time left. We did something down there that's convinced the Graken—the green ones—that there's a race of giants on the earth. They're blotting out a regiment of the giants, but they are sure to believe there are more. So they're going to want to kidnap this planet as soon as they can, so they can get reinforcements from their base for the big fight." Quickly and untechnically he told them how the Graken annexed worlds for their growing system in some far galaxy. "That may happen in the next ten minutes, or it may take a day or so for them to link up their chain of saucers. I'd say at a wild guess, we have an hour to bollix up their plan. So we're going to attack the saucers —"

Kinkaid screeched indignantly. "What! When we could head for cover—live off farms—hide out in the hills—"

"Get this through your miserable skull," bawled Trace. "If so be it these bastards manage to get us into their home system, we will end up in one of two ways: we will be hunted down and slaughtered like vermin, or we'll be caught and bred for food! There won't be any such thing as guerrilla warfare against 'em. They can let loose a billion or two of their people on every continent on the world!" He stepped close to the cowering plump Kinkaid. "I tell you," he hissed angrily, "I think we have a chance to beat them even now. It has to be fast and it'll take every ounce of brains and every last muscle in this whole damn crew to do it. Now take hold of yourself, you excuse for a man, and remember that your breed — not your state or your country or your

nationality, but your *species*—has been slaughtered by the millions; cut down, maybe half wiped out; and now it's heading for the finish, and we're probably the only ones alive who have any idea of the future at all! For God's sake, man, *be* a man! Come on and fight!"

KINKAID stared at him, his eyes round and frightened in the darkness. Then he drew a breath they could all hear plainly as it rasped in his throat. "All right," he said. "You tell me what to do and I'll do it."

Johnson nodded. "I'm sorry. I don't mean to be scared," he said to Trace. "I'll try to help too."

Well, doggone, thought Trace with satisfaction, I figured they could be made into a fighting force, and so they have been. Doggone.

He briskly shared out the weapons: the revolver to Slough, the rifle with its three remaining cartridges to Johnson, a ray pistol to Bill and one to himself. Then without another word he led them down the hill toward the saucers, which were resting again in their long quiet line beyond the smoking ruin of the town.

Jane Kelly he kept close to him, helping her now and then down a bad stretch of rough, icy ground. Once she asked him, "Trace, why do you think they'll take the earth away so soon? Why have we so little time?"

"Logic. They haven't any reason to wait. They're afraid now of the mythical giants. They'll want to yell for help. And—" he paused, and then with surprise he heard himself telling this woman something he had never said to anyone else. "I'm half Irish, half pure black Irish, and I haven't exactly the second sight, mind you, but I do get hunches and they do pan out. Sometimes I'm all crawling with hunches. Well, I am now. I get the feeling that time's closing down like a goddam—pardon me—like a big steel bear-trap on us. My spine prickles and my flesh is inching around on my bones. It's awful danger we're in at this minute, Miss Kelly, worse than it's been till this minute. My God, maybe they're setting those dials now, and us fiddling around on a hillside!"

"Have you any hunch about whether we'll beat them?" she asked seriously, and a feeling of awe at something unknown in his voice took hold of her. He was phrasing his sentences like a wizard in a bog, and she could almost smell the incense of prophecy.

He growled something that sounded obscene. "No," he said, "I tell you true, I haven't the least idea of that. I only know we've been given a peep at their secrets,

and if we don't foul the Graken, nobody ever will." Then he leaped down a steep place, and was silent.

CHAPTER X

AS they ran with loping strides across the frozen plain, Trace heard a shout behind him; he turned his head and there was Hafnagel, pounding after them and calling desperately. Trace slowed a little, jogged on until the big man had caught up with him. "I thought you lit out for the thickets," said Trace shortly.

Hafnagel panted. "I decided to throw in with you," he said. "I was lying out in the brush listening to you . . . I was lonely." He waved his hands, groping for an explanation for conduct he did not wholly understand. "You're crazy," he said, "but I have to go with you. A fellow's got to strike back, I guess. He can't take everything lying down."

"Come on," said Trace.

They neared the first saucer, which lay, a colossal green metal eye staring up at heavy clouds in the winter sky, quiet and yet aware. Bill Blacknight said, a crack in his voice, "Are they looking at us? Are they watching us, Trace?"

"Dunno. We're going inside. Remember, once a Graken sees us, the whole bloody tribe of 'em knows where we are. We've got to kill instantly, or knock the helmets off before we're spied, understand?"

"But a helmet sends radio message when it's removed," the midget Slough protested. "Those helmets called the aliens to them —"

"I doubt it," said Trace. "I think they're useless without a Graken head in 'em. Each of those beauties had a second or so in which to think *danger, danger!* Now let's find the way into this hulk." He turned away impatiently. There was no time to argue possibilities. There was only time to act, and maybe there wasn't even that.

Swiftly he completed a full turn around the silent spacecraft. He could see nothing that might be an entrance; the green metal, steel or whatever alloy might be tougher than steel, showed no crack or crevice. Lord, he thought prayerfully, Lord, we have to find it fast.

Slough said, "It must be one of the ports. Check the ports." He gestured to the rim of the saucer, a thick border which widened every thirty feet to make an oval opening; these were perhaps two feet deep, and closed there by a smooth plate of metal which Trace pre-

sumed would slide away in time of need, to allow guns to project or possibly to serve as rocket jet exhausts. The openings would admit a man, all right, even so large a man as a Graken. And if one of these was the door, then it must be openable from the outside.

He set his group to checking each port; but Bill Blacknight stepped back a little, his mind buzzing. If I was a green one-eyed bird-foot, he thought, and I was trotting up to my personal saucer, I wouldn't want to peer closely at every damn port on the rim before I found the door, would I? Hell, I'd want some sign somewhere, a pointer I could spot without any trouble. Where'd it be? Near the top, most likely, and it ought to be plain enough to see without squinting. He examined what he could see of the top of the ship. The center was a raised bump, round and wide. Bill felt his mouth twitch up with excitement as he saw that it was not a perfect circle; off to the left it pushed out into a sharp point, as though the circle were being pierced from within itself by an arrow. He ran to the section of the edge to which this indicator aimed, and found one of the ports directly in line with it. Softly he called Trace, who came at the double.

"This is it?" asked the sergeant. "Can't see any difference. How do you figure?" Bill told him, as he scanned the lip of the oval port for signs of a door. Nothing. "Boost me up," said Bill.

Hafnagel held him on his shoulders, and Bill leaned into the port and ran his educated fingers over the smooth surfaces therein. He found the lock, a raised set of thumb-sized nodes and two bars that would not move for him. Frantically he searched his mind for every trick he knew of locks and bolts and all such mechanisms. He began trying various manipulations, all his years of magic concentrating in the flying fingers.

The metal plate slid without sound into the sidewall, leaving an opening through which a diffused green glow poured out into his face.

Bill thought of the peculiar way he had moved the node and bar, and node and bar . . . In all the world, it was not likely that any man except a trained magician would have touched them in the right sequence. He puckered his lips and whistled without noise. "What if I'd studied for the law, like Mother wanted me to?" he murmured. "Holy cats!"

Taking the initiative, he hoisted himself from Hafnagel's shoulders and wormed into the hole. The

passage was slick without being actually greased, and within seconds he rose to his feet in the first room of the great disk.

Trace followed, then the others, Hafnagel coming last. They gathered in a taut, apprehensive group, staring about them.

The room was empty of life. There was no sound in the saucer save for their own quick breathing.

CHAPTER XI

WITHOUT a glance at the curious furnishings of the craft, Trace Roscoe headed for the door on the right-hand side. It was a tall rectangle, like an earth-made door, but without knob; as Trace came within a foot of it, it slid into the wall so briskly that he would not have touched it had he been coming at a dead run. Electric eye, or the same principle, he thought, striding forward.

Nor was there anyone in this room, which was plainly a sleeping chamber. Trace marched for the next barrier, but Slough darted over to investigate a narrower door, and thus discovered the first two Graken. The vanishing portal showed a lavatory, and the pair of greenies stared up, startled, from a massive washbowl, in which they had been bathing their faces and bare arms. Their helmets were slung on wall pegs. Both of them went for their pistols, but Trace, not so surprised as they, beat them to the draw. He fired over the tiny man's shoulder, and the Graken died, their flesh dissolving into steam and fragments.

Barbara Skye said her first word in an hour. It was triumphant, but quite unprintable. Jane Kelly said nothing, but she grinned at the other girl with appreciation.

Trace bethought himself of the old Western axiom, that one good man with a rifle was worth four good men with revolvers. He took the big sporting gun from Johnson, and, thrusting his ray pistol into the front of his shirt where it would be handy, walked purposefully at the next door. He had a feeling about this one.

He wasn't wrong. Three aliens grouped around a table, bending above some chart or mathematical calculation, turned and rose as he stepped into the doorway. Two of them he blasted before they had glimpsed him, and the third he took in the face with a heavy slug just as the beast was opening his mouth to shout or challenge. The rifle echoed like artillery in the small room, and Trace thought with a momentary despair that it had likely been heard all through the ship. He stepped over the twitching corpses and went on.

This time the door opened before he had neared it, and a green man, ready and tensed, stood on the threshold with a gun in his big fist. Trace, caught for an instant unawares, went to his knees and jerked up his pistol; it shot its deadly thin stream of force on the heels of the alien's, and he saw it strike the broad chest and begin to disintegrate the whole being. The Graken's shot had missed.

Well, it had missed *him,* Trace realized, as he heard the sharp gasps behind him. He looked and saw Kinkaid's headless body topple over between Barbara and Jane. It proved the incredible depth of the women's feeling for this fight and this terrible problem, for neither of them screamed . . .

Shoulder to shoulder Trace and Bill Blacknight went through the room and their pistols' beams snaked out without sound together, as before them the control panels and intricate machinery of the pilot cubicle appeared behind three tall green-skinned Graken. Slough's revolver bellowed hoarsely behind them. Bill felt a tug at his coat, and later discovered that a great patch of cloth had been burned away by the enemy's rays. Johnson, half-crazed with anger now and gone quite berserk, plunged past them as they fired at the aliens and the last spitting stream from a pistol caught him in the belly and burst his body asunder.

They were in the control room, the six who had come this far alive, and the door through which they had leaped would not close. Bill fumbled wildly at the jamb, at the edge that was flush with the wall, and then Slough said, "The bodies! Roll away the bodies!"

Hafnagel and Bill took unpleasantly blasted corpses by the heels and dragged them out of the cubicle; then, having cleared the space near the door, it slid swiftly shut, leaving them outside. They went to it, it opened, and at last the six were together in a shut room.

Trace handed his pistol to Hafnagel. "Can you trigger it?" he asked, thinking of the man's stiff fingers. Hafnagel put out his hand and flexed it easily. "Don't ask me why," he said shortly. "It happened when we came into this thing." He took the weapon.

"Nervous release," said Trace. "I've seen it happen under fire." He turned to the bank of mechanisms, the sprawling panels full of controls. "Brother," he said under his breath. Then he went to work, trusting the others to guard his back.

Even when he heard Slough's revolver bang twice, he did not look up from the things he was working on.

CHAPTER XII

THEY had killed nineteen Graken, and Slough, reloading the clumsy revolver with his tiny hands, presumed that the entire crew was not dead. They had killed nine on their way in here, and had finished off ten more since, as they barged in the door or crept up to it to attack the presumptuous humans.

The queer part of it was that, although Trace had been sweating blood over the instruments for more than a quarter of an hour, no reinforcements had appeared from the other saucers. Slough did not understand this. Certainly a number of those perishing Grakens had sent out frantic messages for aid before they died; and according to the late Glodd's story, such thought-calls should have been heard even over in Europe, Africa, or Asia, let alone in the saucers that were, so to speak, just next door.

The only answer seemed to be that one saucer was expendable. This, considering the Graken's mutual reliance, must mean that every other saucer was engaged in work of the utmost importance—such as forming the chain which would carry Terra through subspace into the system called Lluagor.

He handed his revolver to Jane Kelly. The girl was pale, but her features were set in strong, determined lines. Slough admired her; she was one of the finest specimens of womankind he had ever seen. "I don't think we can expect more visitors, my dear," he said to her, adding to himself, *unless we find ourselves in another galaxy.* "You keep this ready, however." He went to Trace Roscoe.

Trace gruffed at him. "Don't need you. Get back there."

"Of course you need me. I was an airplane designer, remember? I have some knowledge . . . Have you found the electronic device yet?"

Trace turned up a lined and agonized face. After a moment he said, "No. Not yet."

"Keep going, then. I'll start at the other end," said Slough.

The banks and panels were far more intricate even than they had first supposed. Slough believed that the device they were searching for would probably be a type of klystron, considering the ultrahigh-frequency application. Whatever turn the Graken science had taken, he felt the the principles of electronics, being universal, must be those involved in this sub-space travel; and it did not seem reasonable that an electronic mechanism could be very different on

Chwosst or Terra or Mars or any where else.

Trace believed this too. He was a pretty fair student of electronics and he doubted that any race could disguise a high vacuum thermionic tube or an amplifying circuit or a thyratron so that he, Sergeant Trace Roscoe, couldn't identify it. The photoelectric cells that opened and closed the doors seemed to be of the same type as those used on this planet for the same funtion; Trace had taken two minutes off to pry off the cover of the cell in the left wall and inspect the construction. So he ought to know the "kidnap-device" when he came across it.

He glanced at his watch. More than half an hour had passed since they entered the ship.

The race of man hung on his fingers, which fumbled among a myriad esoteric gadgets in search of one which might be no more than a pair of resonant cavities, an anode, a cathode, and a grid. He felt his coolness departing, the sweat of terror stood on his face, he lost the tough-sergeant veneer and became a panting, panicked man.

Then he caught the eye of Jane Kelly, and he bit his lip and told himself off in Gaelic cuss words, and went to his job again with a firmer grip.

And in five minutes he found the device he was hunting.

"Slough!" he shouted, in the bull's roar that once had nearly drowned out the Red guns in Korea. "Slough, come here!" And the small man, who had been six steps away, bounded to his side with his blue eyes wide in astonishment. "Is this it?" asked Trace fiercely. "Am I right, is this it?"

Slough glared at the small recess, and said, "Aha!" It was an intricate and highly specialized form, if he was any judge, of the resonant cavity magnetrons with which he had worked often in the past. He said so, and Trace nodded. "Okay. Now we gimmick it."

"Can I help?" asked the midget, eager as a boy.

"You're damn right. My fingers are too big to get into all the crannies. You do what I tell you; get in behind the tube, like so, with your index finger . . . "

AS Trace ordered and Slough obeyed, the others came round them, still alert for raiders, but eager to listen to the mysterious words which came, sharp and intense, from the sergeant's lips. Now and then Slough would disagree, and they'd argue; Bill began to fidget with apprehension. The words were Greek to him.

"But if we lead in the wire from

this other thing, which has got to be the fuel feed—"

"Why must it be? We don't know it is. I say build up the frequency of oscillation until—"

"Well, then, stick your damn fingers over here and hold this steady while I—"

And so on. Bill was certain that it would never end, that they must be caught at sunrise by an investigating party of the green aliens; but suddenly the midget and the soldier were moving off from the control banks, looking at each other with expressions half smug and half fearful. "Let's get out," said Trace abruptly.

"What did you do?" asked Jane Kelly, as they hurried through the rooms toward the entrance port.

"Gimmicked it," said Trace. His hand fell on her arm and squeezed reassuringly. "The electronic device is now altered so it'll build up an intolerable frequency; it's also connected with the thing we think is the fuel feeder, and with a row of buttons we're almost certain connect with the blasting rays."

They reached the port. "In other words," prompted Jane, "what?"

"In other words, when the ships are set to zoom old Earth into the sub-space subways, this disk is going to blow sky-high; and since they're all connected in series electronically, the whole goddam fleet will explode simultaneously."

They wriggled through the short passage, dropped to the ground. It was very dark on the plain. Patches of snow on the ground showed dark shapes of tree and bush and boulder; after the green light of the saucer, this outer world was dim and full of illusions. Jane thought she saw a Graken approaching, and stifled a scream when she realized it was the shadow of a swooping owl. She said loudly, "I don't like it."

"What?" asked Trace. They were standing in the shadow of the saucer, indecisive.

"I don't like this. It's too easy. It's a let-down." She grasped him by the arms, and he, startled, looked down into her face that was a lovely softened blur in the night. "I'm half Irish too, Trace Roscoe, half pure black Irish; that's the Kelly in me. And I tell you plain, I feel wrong about this. It can't happen so pat, you can't just change a wire or two, hook up this and attach that, and foil the kidnapping of a whole world. There's something wrong, there's a thing missing that's vital."

"Baby," he said, so low that no one heard but the girl, "I can tell you what it is. It's a security on this. Because there's about one chance in a thousand that what we did will work like we want it to. That

machinery's out of this world. Half of what we did I can't explain to myself, even. We just made a purblind stab at bollixing the deal."

"It's something else. You're forgetting something. Oh, Trace, Trace," she cried suddenly, gripping him savagely in her anguish, "I know! It's that there's no crew in this saucer, and they aren't coming to fight us! That means they've either taken the earth into their galaxy already, or else that they'll do it without bothering about this saucer—and then where will your fine plan be?"

Trace almost sat down, his body went so limp. "Oh My God," he said slowly in capitals. "I never thought of that."

"You've got to get a crew here," she said, as the others crowded about them stammering their worry and terror. "You've got to get them out of their ships, no matter how busy they are, and let them see that they can take this one over again. They can't know anything that's happened since we killed the last one in there."

"She's right," exclaimed Bill. "We have to create a diversion to suck 'em out of their hidey-holes, Trace."

"The only way is to attack the saucers," he said wearily, "and how we do that with two rayguns and a revolver, heaven only knows."

"Why, we do it with two rayguns and a revolver, then," said Barbara suddenly. "Why not? That next saucer's maybe a hundred feet away. Take a shot at it, for Pete's sake. Try it and see."

Trace inflated his chest and stuck out his jaw and once more he was the complete sergeant. He tore the pistol from Bill's hand, raised it and sent a streak of green death arrowing at the dark bulk of the spacecraft. Playing it along the rim, he tried to strike the oval ports with it; and he did not release the trigger for a full minute. "Now let's see," he said. He looked at Jane and the redhead. "You two take off," he barked. "Head for the hill, pronto." His tone was so unanswerable that they ran, Jane twisting her head back at every third step. Shortly they were out of sight.

Nothing moved, and if there was any damage to the other saucer, it could not be seen from where the men stood. Trace, impatient, was lifting the weapon again, when a green light shone out from the center of the edge.

"Ah," breathed Trace. "We've raised 'em. Now let 'em come, don't stop 'em, and we'll man this death-trap yet!"

CHAPTER XIII

THEY lay in a kind of shallow ditch just under the outer edge of the great saucer, watching the orange lights from the helmets bob and duck nearer. Bill said quietly, "We're cut off from the hill now."

"That's okay. The women will wait; and we can fall back on the ruins of the town if they chase us. They may just investigate the ship here, and not bother with us. We are only vermin, after all."

Hafnagel said, "What if they see the changes you made in that panel?"

"They shouldn't, unless they look almighty close."

"And will it work?" asked the big man.

"Who the hell knows?" retorted Trace irritably. "Maybe it's too late now. Maybe we're spinning around Tsloahn already. Who can tell? We can't see the stars, the clouds are too thick."

The aliens were very close now and the four men fell silent. The lamps drew up to the deserted ship, hesitated, and at last one lifted and disappeared, as its wearer vanished into the open port. Trace shut his eyes and said a quick private prayer of thanksgiving; then he whispered, "We're okay now. Let's head for the ruins." They crawled out of the ditch and like a quartet of raiding Comanches, their work done, made for the empty wreckage at top speed.

Behind them a shout went up, a raucous croak of triumph. Then a voice said weirdly in English, pitched high and carrying, "Not run, die!"

Trace got the idea, disagreed with it, and put all his strength into a terrific sprint. He found himself bathed in orange radiance, as the distant Graken focused their helmet beams; just before the first green ray was fired, he saw a very low wall of bricks miraculously uncrumbled, jinked and made for it, dived over and landed on his chest with a scarce-felt smack of pain. The others followed him, and hugged dirt as the rayguns sliced the cold air harmlessly.

After a while the orange glow went away. Trace cautiously looked over the wall. He couldn't see anything but he had a feeling. They hadn't all gone into the ships, he knew that.

He was not quite unprepared, therefore, when the Graken came over the bricks on top of him.

It was probably the largest and heaviest of all those whom the band had seen. It fell on Trace like the side of a collapsing barn, and Trace felt all his breath leave his lungs in one excruciating wheeze. He fought to bring the muzzle of the raygun against it, but could not

move his arm, which was pinned under the creature's knee. Only the soldier's left arm was free. He flailed a blow that landed solidly, but the alien only squalled, and chopped at his face with its clubbed pistol. Trace felt skin and flesh give way along his cheekbone, blood gush from the slice of the metal. He heaved up as heartily as he could, at the same time aiming another left jab for the brute's face. His knuckles took it square in the eye. It shrieked, reeled back on its knees, and Trace fought tigerishly and was free. He delivered his finest right cross to the throat, and the Graken writhed on the frozen earth. Then Slough and Bill were there—the fight had taken only seconds—and the magician in a frenzy of rage booted the green head with the toe of his heavy shoe. That was that.

Slough's voice said softly, "*Monstrum horrendum, informe, ingens, cui lurmen ademptium.*" He rolled the big head up to the dusky light, and the broad single eye gaped blankly. "Virgil said that about another Cyclops, luckily of a mythical breed. 'A horrible monster, misshapen, vast, whose only eye had been put out.'" He sighed. "Trace, the only real work we had is done, for failure or success it's finished, and we can't do any more good here. Let us go back to the women. If so be it our plan succeeds, they'll need you to watch over them in the—ah, the post-war world, which may be a little wild for a time. And if we've lost our gamble, then you should be with your girl when the end comes. You can't do any good by fighting guerrilla-fashion down here."

"My girl?" asked Trace, who had no idea of how he had been moon-calfing at Jane Kelly.

Hafnagel laughed. It was a joyous sound, the expression of a troubled man who had found release. "Go on, Sarge," he said. "Go to the hill, all three of you. I'll cover your withdrawal from here." He hefted the raygun he carried. "Don't argue with me," he said before Trace could speak. "You know a retreat needs a rear guard—and I mean to have another Graken scalp or two before I quit. Go on."

Trace argued in passionate whispers, but shortly found himself creeping on all fours across the razed town, without fully remembering how he had left the wall. There was no sound or sign of movement on all the wide plain; and as they came to the beginnings of the slope, he said, "I shouldn't have left him. He ought to have come with us."

Then they saw in the distance the streaks of green fire, and a pair

of orange spotlights which almost immediately went out. The ray pistols kept darting their beams along the ground, and Trace said again, "I shouldn't have left Hafnagel."

"He never meant to follow us," said Slough.

"It was right to leave him," said Bill Blacknight quietly. "You gave him a few minutes of glory. That's no bad deal, you know."

When they crested the hill, the green shafts had vanished, and the plain was dark under the heavy clouds that hid the sky.

CHAPTER XIV

THE five of them sat on the lip of the hill, hunched up against the cold, clasping their knees and occasionally rubbing hands or ankles for warmth. Trace had one arm around Jane Kelly, whose dark head lay against his chest. He was almost happy. He thought he had lost, lost his vengeance and his universe, and still he was all but contented, because he had this girl close to him.

The saucers rested without motion on the plain. The clouds had thinned, the moon's location could be told by its misted radiance, but no stars shone and the humans could not tell whether they were spinning around Sol or Tsloahn. After all, as Trace had said, the moon might have been kidnapped with them—or it might be a different moon, one of the other stolen planets in the Graken's home system.

Barbara hated stillness. She asked Trace, "How come those greenies thought your damned old movie was real? Couldn't they tell it was only a picture—them and their high IQ's?"

"No," said Trace. He roused himself and looked over at her. Bill Blacknight was snuggled against her (oh, for warmth, sure, thought Trace cynically) and the magician was obviously on the verge of the same strange happiness that touched Trace himself. "No," he said again, "they couldn't tell it was a picture."

"Why not?"

"Because they only have one eye apiece."

"I don't see what difference that makes."

He assumed the role of patient instructor, dredging in his memory for the right words. "You need two eyes functioning as one organ to have what they call binocular vision. The retina isn't adapted for three-dimensional perception, see?"

"No," said Barbara.

"Well, to perceive solid things for what they are, you have to have

two retinal images, thrown on both eyes by the one object. You get help from linear and aerial perspective—if you know the size of a thing you can judge how far away it is—but supposing you don't know its size, you're liable to misjudge its distance if you've only got one eye. One eye, two dimensions; two eyes, three dimensions."

"I get that," said Bill sleepily. "How'd you happen to think of it, Trace?"

"It was Slough here. Twice a greenie made a mistake as to how far away he was: once on the street, when it didn't grab for him when it could have, and again in the theater, when Glodd motioned for him to come closer, and hit him accidentally. Both of them thought Slough was average human size. Both were looking at him from a low viewpoint, the first on its knees and Glodd sitting on the floor. That's when it occurred to me that their eyesight must be two-dimensional. Of course it wouldn't bother them on their home planets, where everything was known by size and aerial perspective filled in their deficiencies. Probably their navigational instruments made up for their lack of depth perception in flight, too. But when I turned the Nazi Army onto them, they were baffled. They must have thought giants were coming up out of a hole under the theater. Which is why they ran like hell, and then blasted the town."

"Very clever," said Slough. Jane echoed this, and Trace said to her quietly, "I'm not quite the uneducated slob you might think I was, baby."

"I don't think anything of the sort! You're—you're a man, a fine tough intelligent man." She was so sincere she sounded angry. Trace glowed with pride.

THERE was a very long silence then. Nobody moved from their chosen vantage point. The hidden moon went down. At last Trace cleared his throat self-consciously.

"I'd like to ask a question myself. Of you, Slough."

After a slight pause, Slough said, "What is it, Trace?"

"Well, you're a little too smart a geezer for reality, if you know what I mean. You figured those helmets for thought-radios, when it was a fantastic possibility that no normal man would have hit on so quick with so little to go on. Then you did things with the electronic device in that saucer that I couldn't have come up with in a coon's age."

"I'm an engineer," said the tiny man. He chuckled. "And I read a lot of science-fiction."

"Okay. Then there's this. Thirty-odd hours ago you had a badly broken left arm, which I set for you and put in a sling." Trace spoke slowly, almost with fear now that he voiced his suspicions. "Some time during our first raid on the town, you discarded the sling; when we were in the saucer, you fought and afterwards you worked on the instruments with both hands. It's impossible, but it must be true—your arm knit completely within a day." He turned and bending over Jane Kelly he stared wide-eyed at the dark figure of the little man.

"Slough," said Trace huskily, *"what are you?"*

Slough sighed. "Whatever I am, Trace Roscoe, I am not your enemy. No, nor ever shall be, yours or your people's. Look!" He cried out so suddenly that the four of them, shocked, stared out in the direction in which he gestured. "The saucers," he said, "they're rising!"

"The gimmicked one?" asked Bill, whose eyes were bleary with lack of sleep.

"Yes, all of 'em," said Trace. He jumped up, hauling Jane to her feet with him. "It's coming, they're hoping to do it," he said, and he clenched his teeth and took a firm grip on the girl, as though he wanted to hold her on the earth when it shot into the uncanny regions of sub-space. "Hold tight," he said, with no particular sense but a vast deal of emotion. "Hold tight, Jane baby." And Jane held him tightly.

The saucers rose higher, dwindling in size; they reached the low cloud layer and passed into it, becoming hazy and then invisible.

Twenty thousand spacecraft girdled the globe, linked electronically, readied for flight with their stolen planet to unknowable distances of deep space.

The men and women waited, their breath emerging in brief white frosty spurts in the cold air. And nothing happened.

After twenty minutes, Trace put a trembling hand to his forehead. "We lose," he said. He saw Slough begin to walk away from them, going back along the gradual slope among the bare trees, but he did not even call after him. It didn't matter a damn now, what or who the midget was.

"We lose," he said again, and hugged Jane fiercely.

And then the sky exploded.

CHAPTER XV

TRACE flung himself on the ground, sheltering Jane; he felt rather than saw that Bill had done the same with Barbara. He

gazed up, and saw the great rack of clouds torn and dispersed by the force of the blast. There was a chain of brilliant green-white balls of light, like so many bursting sky-rockets, that stretched from horizon to black horizon across his world. He thought of the shards of metal, the evil whistling splinters and hunks of meteoring death that would rain out of the sky after such a multiple explosion, and he buried his face in Jane's soft hair, trying desperately to cover her whole body with his own. The noise above them was so mighty a roar that Trace was deafened, and his head hummed and rang intolerably.

In that moment, oddly, he thought again of Slough, and realized what he must be. The Irish intuition, second sight, or what-have-you it works in a cockeyed way, he said to himself, waiting for the shower of molten hail.

Slough was of the extraterrestrials too!

Oh, not the Graken, the wicked green one-eyed bird-footed destroyers. But he was a saucerman, right enough. Lord knew how many of them had been living among us before the greenies attacked. No telling how many had died, how many still lived.

Trace remembered the saucer sightings that had perplexed the Air Force for so many years before. The blue-lit disks that soared and dipped and shot away from pursuit, the disks which had been seen by reputable folk for—well, possibly for centuries. Funny he hadn't thought of it before, but all those well-vouched-for sightings could not have been Graken. The Graken shot into our system no longer ago than late December! And all the long while before we'd been under the surveillance of *blue-lit* saucers—not green, but blue at night and silvery in the sunlight!

He wriggled, his body awaiting the impact of the metallic missiles, his mind occupied with Slough.

And if there'd been saucers here for so long, and even saucer-people among us, what had happened to them when the Graken came? Any space battles between warring saucers would have been seen. Had they retreated to their own planet at sight of the Graken fleet, through space or interdimensional sub-space? Maybe. Or maybe they'd hidden in or on the earth.

Why hadn't they fought? The Graken had no allies in the universe. The blue-disk cowards had run! Except old Slough, if he were one, he hadn't run. Why had the great ships left Terra? Not their fight? Or . . .

Or suppose they couldn't fight!

Suppose they had no weapons in their craft, no rays nor bombs—Trace exclaimed wordlessly as this probable truth occurred to him. The blue disks were only observers, they weren't warcraft. Perhaps their people had no weapons at all. Perhaps they were a nation of peace, as the Graken were a nation of eternal war. And their long watch over the world had been either curiosity, or hopeful friendliness.

In which case, they'd likely be back. Trace hoped they would; he had liked Slough. Terra could use friends now.

He jerked his head up and stared at the sky. Even if the Graken ships had been three miles up, their remains should have showered down to earth by this time. He got to his feet with a grunt. The gimmicking of the controls in that saucer had been better than he'd known; the ring of saucers had not only exploded, they'd been atomized.

TRACE helped Jane to her feet, as Bill Blacknight did the same for Barbara. "Well," said Trace, "let's not sit on our cans out here all night. Let's get this show on the road. We have a hell of a lot to do."

"Such as what?" asked Bill.

"Mac," said Trace firmly, "this is still the Army of the United States, and we got a world to police up. There'll be more left than us four; there'll be millions of people, here and on the other continents too, who'll need all the help we can give 'em."

"We can help the world?" asked Barbara. "Us four?"

"We've done a lot already," said Jane drily.

"There's more, we haven't begun yet. We have to find a radio, get in touch again," said Trace, his voice strong and happy. "There ought to be some planes left, in private airports and out in the country. We got to scrape together what's left of civilization and patch it up and make it better than it ever was. You know anybody that could do the job better?"

"No," Jane said, "darling." Trace blinked. He was not a demonstrative man, but he leaned over and kissed her on the nose with haste and embarrassment. "Come on," he said, gulping a little, "we got work to do."

They started off along the crest of the hill, and then Bill grasped Trace's arm and said in a whisper, "Oh, oh Lord, we forgot."

"Forgot what?"

"We may be in the Graken's star system, what the hell was it, in Lluagor! They took such a long

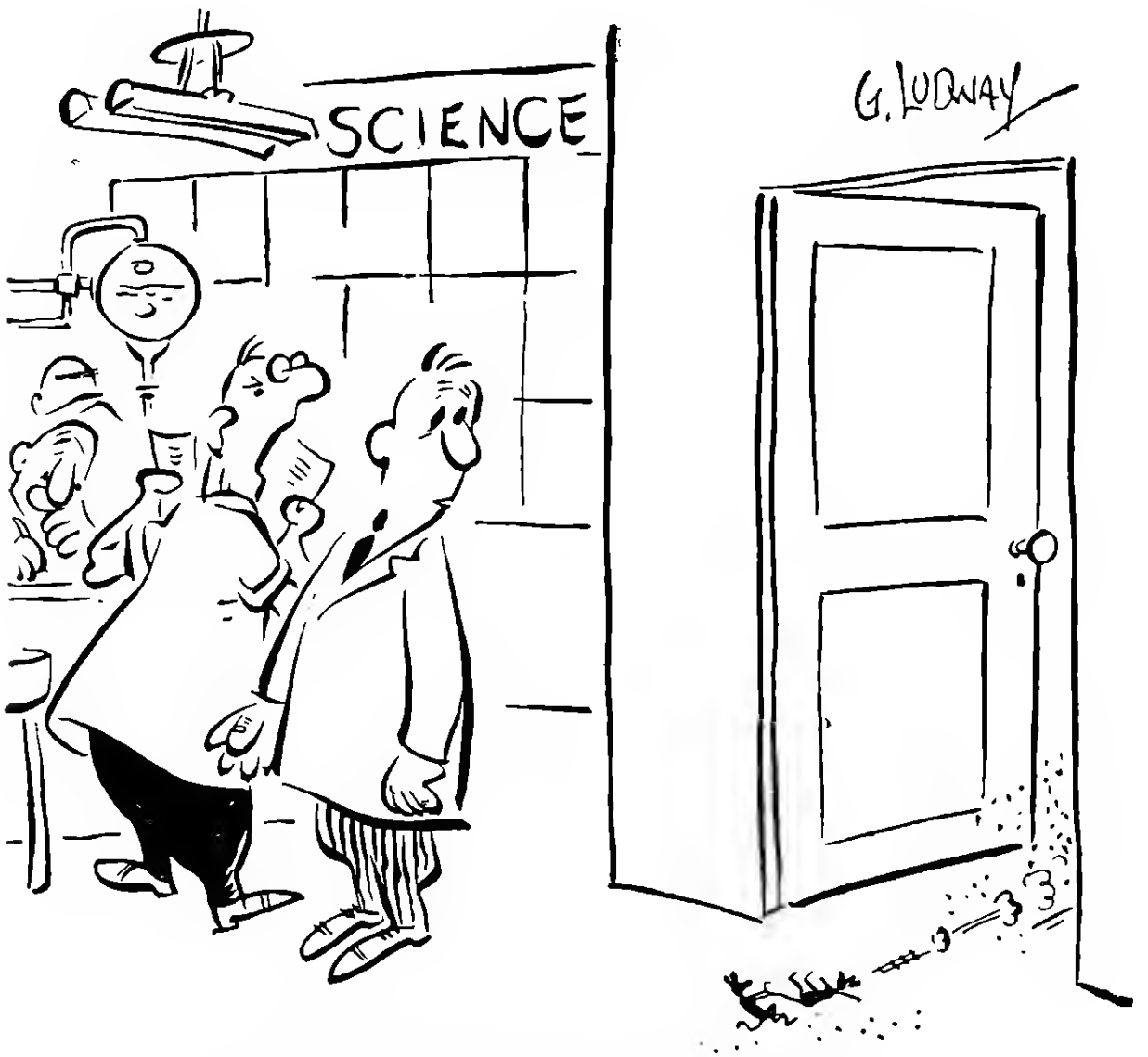
time—maybe they got us there before they blew up!"

The four people searched each other's faces silently, and even Trace was too appalled at the thought to verify it for a moment. Then Jane Kelly turned her face up to the sky, where the clouds had been rent and scattered by the blast.

After a long moment she put her hand in Trace's.

"I'm not much of an astronomer, Trace," she said, her voice calm and sweet and proud. "But even so, I can recognize the Big Dipper when I see it." She pressed his fingers affectionately. "And I *do* see it," she said . . .

—The End—



"You're a new man, so don't go fooling with things you're not familiar with!"

★ Atom-Proof Umbrella! ★

NOT long ago, an engineer remarked, "the trouble with guided missiles is—we ain't got none!" At the time he spoke his pessimism was warranted. However, wraps are coming off many a secret project and the government is granting tantalizing glances into our real arsenal—the laboratory.

A true guided missile—to be carefully distinguished from what hither-to have been "projectiles"—is the miraculous rocket, "the Nike". This anti-aircraft weapon, named after a Greek goddess, is basically a radar-guided bomber-killer, designed for one thing, the destruction of invading aircraft. So far as is known, it is a slim tube, not unlike the Navy's "Viking" rocket, powered by an extremely forceful rocket motor, armed with a devastating warhead, and controlled in a number of different ways.

While radar from the ground is the basic controlling device, it is expected that this is a temporary measure since bombers will eventually be able to jam any radio mechanism. The "Nike" (pronounced, nigh-key) may be fitted with a heat-seeking gadget enabling it to home unerringly right on the bomber, regardless of what contorted evasive maneuvers the plane may make. Further improvements will make this the only certain atom-proof umbrella!



"As near as I can figure, this is as close as we get to that planet for another million years!"

Let Space Be Your Coffin

by

S. M. Tenneshaw

Bert hated Miles, and secretly plotted to kill him. It all seemed simple, yet murder can be complicated — especially in the void! . . .

BERT thought savagely, *I'm going to kill you, Miles Berendt. You've always lorded it over me—thought you were something extra special when we were kids. Now you've practically taken over the business I helped build. My business — the best damned space freight line in the system! And you've got your eyes on Carol —my girl! Well, look smug, Miles. This is your last day alive—tomorrow they won't even find your atoms!*

"Something eating you, Bert?"

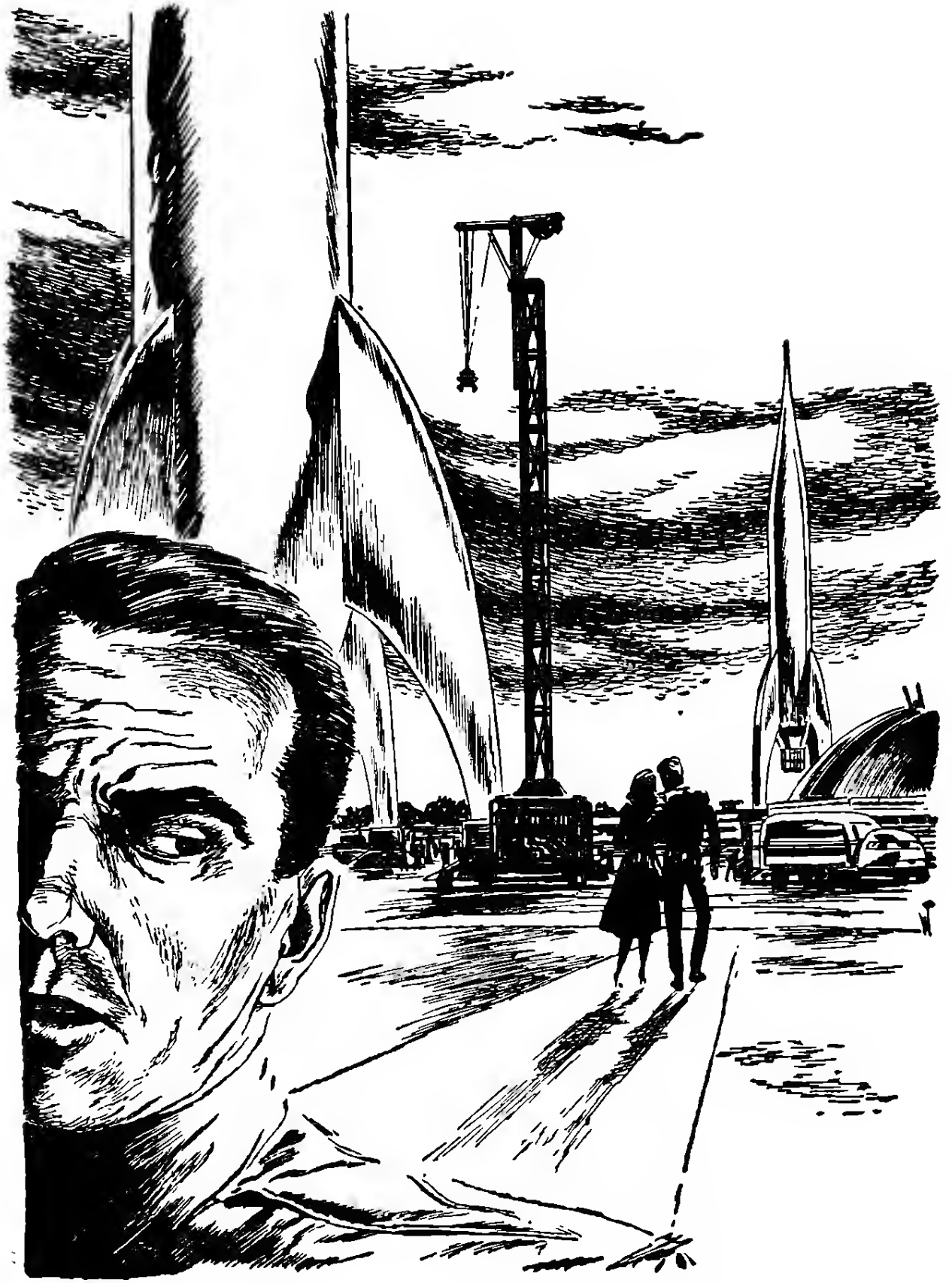
Miles Berendt closed the tally book and shoved it aside on the desk. He eased his six-foot frame back in the chair behind the desk and stared quizzically at Bert Tanner. Tanner was standing by the window, staring moodily out toward the long line of space hangars.

Tanner twisted abruptly, stared at Berendt, and laughed shortly. "What? Not a thing, Miles. Not a thing . . . "

Berendt sighed. "I'm glad. With business as good as it is, and that new contract with Deimos Mines almost in our laps we've got reason to celebrate. I thought maybe you, Carol and I could sort of relax with a few drinks at my place tonight—"

"Carol?" Bert bit her name out sharply. Too sharply. He forced the edge from his voice and glanced uneasily away from Berendt to stare out the window until he could get his emotions under control. *Don't let him suspect — not now* . . . Out of the corner of his eye he saw Miles get up from behind the desk and walk slowly over toward him. Berendt had his hands in his pants pockets.

"You sure nothing's bothering you, Bert?"



Tanner started to turn from the window. But his gaze was caught by a trim figure coming into view across the smooth concrete expanse separating the office building from the repair hangar. It was a girl. A blonde girl. A dream of a figure in form-fitting plastisilk. It was Carol. She was coming toward the office building, a file of papers under one arm.

"Bert. I asked you a question."

Tanner pulled his eyes away from the window. As he did so Miles glanced past him. A smile pulled at his thin, firm lips as he saw Carol approaching the building. The sun was going down in the west, and she was framed in a golden-red halo with the tapering, glinting metallic tips of two space ships, the *Viking* and *Space Queen II* in their ground cradles for a backdrop. To Miles it was a beautiful picture. The smile on his lips widened.

Tanner saw the smile and his own swarthy features grew dark. "You trying to needle me, Miles?" his voice was edgy, almost harsh.

Berendt pulled his gaze away from the window and Carol's vanishing figure as she rounded a corner of the building.

"Needle you, Bert? What the hell gave you that idea? You're acting pretty peculiar—"

"Maybe just normal. Could that be it, Miles?"

Berendt shrugged, glancing closely at his partner. "I know you pretty well, Bert. Something's bothering you. You're pretty moody lately. Perhaps you better not take the Deimos run if you're not up to it. Even Carol has remarked—"

"Carol?" The harshness was in Bert Tanner's voice. And Miles Berendt frowned as he saw the wild light that sprang up suddenly in Tanner's eyes. "So you and Carol have been talking about me!" Tanner almost shouted. "Or is it maybe that you've been talking to Carol—trying to poison her against me!"

MILES showed sudden astonishment. His hands came out of his pockets and he tried to place one of them on Bert's shoulder. "Look here, Bert, you really are upset—"

Tanner threw his arm away from him with a violent movement. "Get your goddamned hands off me, Miles." His voice grated and his hands suddenly formed into fists at his sides.

Berendt frowned, his eyes narrowed in thought now. "I was only half-kidding before when I asked you what was wrong, Bert. Now I'm demanding. What the hell's the matter with you? Every

time I mention Carol's name you seem to blastoff."

Tanner laughed suddenly. But it wasn't a pleasant laugh. He moved away from Berendt and stood with his hands resting on top of a glassite table near the window. There was a scale model of a space ship—a trim freighter—resting on top of the table. As Tanner's eyes remained fastened on Berendt, his hand ran along the smooth side of the model ship.

"Women are like a space ship, Miles, or hadn't you noticed?"

Berendt frowned but did not speak.

"Go on, play dumb. You've been pretty good at it for the past several months. Thought you were fooling me, didn't you?"

"Bert, for crissakes, what's eating you?"

"See this ship, Miles?" Bert's voice had a tautness to it. "It was our first one. We built this business with it—or should I say, I built the ship, you built the business?"

"Whatever we did we did together, Bert. You know that. I've always said you were the real brain here—without your technical skill there wouldn't be a Tanner-Berendt Space Lines. But what are you leading up to?"

Tanner's hand ran fondly along the lines of the model ship. "A ship's like a woman — as I said," Bert said. "Both have beauty and dignity, but they're no good without a man . . . the right man."

"You're talking in riddles, Bert."

Tanner laughed again. "Like I said, Miles, take this ship. Our first one. I practically built it by hand with Jeff Morrow helping. Jeff loved her almost as much as I did. Even you loved her, I suppose."

Miles nodded. "The Space Queen was a honey. But that was five years ago. Why all this retrospection? And Jeff's got quite a few other ships to love these days—our whole fleet!"

"We'll forget about Jeff," Tanner went on. "This is between you and me. I mentioned the Space Queen because the day we launched her was the day Carol walked into the office looking for a job. I hired her. She worked for me in the research labs for three years and everything was fine. Then you butted your nose in and convinced her she belonged in operations. She switched to your office—all very polite, but don't think for one damned minute I didn't know what you had in mind!"

"Bert, I swear to God if you don't stop blatting like a drunken spacer, I'll—"

"You'll what?" Tanner moved toward the desk and stood in front

of Berendt. He was shorter by three inches, but his body was stockier. "Beat some sense into my thick skull? Teach me the facts of life? Maybe I've got a few ideas like that right now. Maybe I know all I have to know. Like talking me into giving you carte blanche in handling the Lines business affairs. Like—"

"We discussed that pretty thoroughly, Bert. You decided you wanted to stick close to the research and shop end. And—"

"—like stealing my girl."

MILES Berendt stiffened. The concern that had been on his features changed to shocked surprise. And then sudden anger.

"Now listen, here, Bert. If you've got any crazy ideas about Carol and me—"

"You're going to deny that you are in love with her?"

Berendt shoved his hands back in his pockets. "That, Bert, is none of your business. And if you've got some paranoic idea that I'm doing something behind your back then I suggest you see Doctor Lenning. Aside from that, aren't you presuming a bit about Carol's feelings?"

"When she was working with me she used to be pretty close to me. You changed that. Maybe I ought to change a few things too. Like your face for instance."

The two men stared at each other tensely, silently. Tanner's eyes were glowing now with repressed hatred. Miles Berendt showed disbelief, as if he were seeing Bert Tanner for the first time.

"I don't want to fight you, Bert. Not that I'm afraid to. It's just that you're so wrong about everything. Good heavens, man—"

"On top of everything you're yellow." Bert spat the word out.

Miles pulled his hands from his pockets and his grey eyes hardened. "You shouldn't have said that, Bert. I don't have to take that from anyone, not even my closest friend."

"Then take this!" Tanner swung his right hand in a sharp uppercut swing. But two things prevented the blow from landing. One was Miles Berendt's swift backward move, and the other was the sharp slamming of the office door and a gay feminine voice.

"Hi, gang! Hey, what's going on in here? You boys fighting over someone?" she laughed.

Bert's fist stopped its movement and his arm fell to his side. He turned to see Carol Grant standing inside the closed door to the office, papers in one hand, the other placed provocatively on her well-rounded hip.

"Well? Are you both a couple of

statues? Somebody say something."

It was Miles who cleared his throat and forced a grin. "Sounds silly, I'll admit, but I had a crick in my neck—Bert was going to try and straighten it out . . . "

Carol laughed. "Seems like a pretty drastic kind of cure. Bert, you looked like you were all set to land a haymaker!" She moved over to the desk and dropped the papers on top. "If you've still got that crick, Miles, I've got a better way to get rid of it. Sit down."

She moved between the two men and gently shoved Miles toward his chair. Embarrassed, Miles sat down, his eyes lowered from hers.

Carol moved around behind him and placed her cool fingers on the back of his neck. Gently she began to massage him. "There, isn't that better?"

Bert's face darkened as he watched, but he kept his emotions under control now. As he looked into Miles' eyes he realized that he had made a fool of himself. Would Miles suspect anything else? Inwardly Bert cursed himself.

"While I'm playing nurse to the boss, why don't you check over the Deimos contracts, Bert? I just put them on the desk. Now all we have to do is to get to Deimos and have the Waring Cartel sign up. I don't mind telling you I sweated on those papers. If I do say so they're as neat a package as our high-priced lawyers could turn out."

Miles managed a laugh to kill the tenseness inside him. "If you had your way, Carol, we wouldn't need anybody but the three of us to run this business."

She pouted. "Keep it in the family's my motto. Which reminds me, have you told Bert the good news?"

Miles dropped his gaze away from Bert and stared uncomfortably toward the far wall and the model of the Space Queen. He was glad Carol couldn't see his face at that moment.

It was Tanner who broke the suddenly strained silence. "News? What news, Carol?"

SHE stopped massaging Miles' neck and moved to his side to sit on the edge of the desk. She crossed one shapely leg over the other and there was a happy glow in her eyes as she looked down at Miles.

"There, I guess I've spoiled the surprise party after all." She looked over to Bert. "Did Miles tell you we were going to have a private party this evening?"

Bert nodded, his brow furrowed with a frown. "He mentioned getting together for a few drinks to celebrate the Deimos contract I'm going after tomorrow . . . "

"I guess I did spoil things,

Miles." Carol flushed and looked at Berendt.

Miles shrugged. "No harm done, honey. Bert," he looked up at Tanner. "What Carol is trying to say is that we were planning on a few drinks to celebrate not only the Deimos contract, but also our engagement."

"Engagement!" The word left Bert's lips in a stunned gasp.

Carol nodded smiling and moved away from the desk with a lithe movement to stand before Bert. "That's right, Bert. We wanted you to be the first to know. Miles and I are going to be married as soon as we sign the Waring contract on Deimos. Miles wanted to have the wedding here on Earth, but like most women I've decided on an interplanetary wedding! You won't mind us going in the *Viking* in your place?"

The glance that Tanner threw at Miles Berendt was one of venom. Miles felt the whiplash of accusation that welled from Bert's eyes, from his darkening face, the clenching tight muscles around his lips.

"A few minutes before Carol came in you said that perhaps I wasn't up to the Deimos trip. What's the matter, Miles, didn't you have the guts to come out and say you planned on going, and why?"

Miles tried to keep his voice pleasant. "You're wrong, Bert. I meant to tell you tonight that Carol and I wanted to go in your place. What I said earlier was prompted by other reasons. I'm more than sure I was right about them now."

Bert laughed harshly, turned to Carol. "Miles suggested that I ought to see Doctor Lenning. While everybody seems to think congratulations are in order my partner infers I'm ready for a medic checkout. Bert Tanner, ready for the Lenning sanitorium on Venus. Where all space-happy company employees ease their tortured minds. A good place too for an unwelcome partner."

Carol's face showed shocked astonishment. "Bert! Have you gone insane—the things you're saying—"

Bert turned wrathful eyes on her. "I see he's even got you thinking his way! Well, I don't intend to go to Venus and see Lenning. I'm going to Deimos as planned. The Waring contract is half mine. I'll be damned if he steals the business from me too!"

Miles was on his feet. "I'm warning you, Bert. Stop that kind of talk. You don't know what you're saying."

"I know what I'm saying, and even more, I know what I'm going to do. I'm taking the Viking to Deimos, and once I sign with Waring you can consider our partner-

ship ended. You can have the Earth operation all to your goddamned self. I'll start up with the Deimos deal."

Tanner leaned forward and scooped up the contracts from the desk as Carol watched him in stunned concern. "Bert—why—"

He turned toward her, his eyes smouldering. "Carol, you're making a mistake with Miles. He only wants you so he can pin up another triumph over me. He—"

"Get out, Bert. You've said enough."

Tanner looked at Miles Berendt. Miles had his arm around Carol but there was a fire in his eyes.

TANNER laughed. "You can forget about Deimos, Miles. I'm going in the morning. Jeff Morrow is setting the auto-pilot on the *Viking* as I instructed. I'm afraid you'll have to find another wedding present. One that you can't steal."

Turning, he slammed out of the room, hearing Carol sob in Miles Berendt's arms as he went.

On his way to the rocket hangars, Bert stared into the red sunset. It seemed to bathe the launching cradles in a fiery pool of blood. And his own blood pounded as he walked from the operations office building. *You fool!* he swore inwardly. *You could have killed him tonight and made it look like an accident—but you had to make a scene . . . Now Carol knows how you feel . . . You've spoiled your plan . . . He'll be on guard now . . . You stupid fool!*

In that moment he realized he had lost not only his chance to kill Miles with no possible suspicion on himself, but he had also lost Carol. Carol. He thought of her. Was she so blind? Didn't she know what Miles was doing? He remembered the way she had looked at Berendt. And then he suddenly knew that she was in love with Miles. Probably the two of them had carefully planned this Deimos move . . . suggesting that he go to the Lenning institute on Venus . . .

The blood-red sunset fixed the *Viking* and *Space Queen II* in its fiery glow. Even at a distance he could see the crew of workmen around the base of the *Viking*. The ship being readied for Mars and its mineral laden satellite, Deimos. The ship that Berendt and Carol Grant had planned to usurp for their wedding trip . . . Their wedding trip.

Suddenly Bert Tanner's lips pulled back in a harsh grin. It was all clear, suddenly. He had vowed that Miles Berendt would die before he left Earth. That seemed out of the question now. But was it? And Carol? Suddenly he hated her.

Her beauty. Her smiling face and friendly charm. A sham. A damned miserable sham. Well, all right. Wedding trip. He thought, *two can die as easily as one . . .*

"EVERYTHING'S all set, Mr. Tanner."

Jeff Morrow came up to him in the dusk as Bert watched the crew of mechanics leave the base of the Viking's launching cradle and head for the hangars.

"Right on schedule, Jeff." Bert shifted the papers he held and looked at his chrono-wristdial. "The auto-pilot set?"

Jeff nodded, his thin face smiling in the gathering shadows. "All you have to do is bring along a good book, Mr. Tanner. Escape velocity set for ten minute thrust; space drive will hook in automatically at thirty minutes, 70,000 m.p.h."

"Fine, Jeff. I can always depend on you. You're one man I can trust to do a job right."

Jeff Morrow grinned. "Thanks, Mr. Tanner. Working for you and Mr. Berendt is more than a job for me. You're two of the swellest guys I ever met."

Tanner was glad the shadows of night hid the grimace on his face. He slapped Morrow friendily on the shoulder. "Speaking of Miles, reminds me. He's having a private little party at his place tonight. To celebrate his engagement to Carol Grant. Said he'd like to have you drop around for a drink. Think you can make it?"

Morrow nodded. "Why, of course. Say, I hope you don't mind my saying it, Mr. Tanner, but I was wondering when one of you would get around to marrying Miss Grant! Mr. Berendt sure is a lucky guy!"

Bert's lips were twisted but he knew Jeff couldn't see them clearly. "Miles was the lucky man, Bert. But then, my life is tied up with my work. Marriage is something for the office boys . . . "

Jeff laughed. "Guess maybe you are right. But I'll bet you won't stay single long now that Mr. Berendt has set the pace."

"Maybe not, Jeff. Maybe not. You're all through here?"

"Yes, sir. Blastoff will be shortly before dawn. Care to make a final check with me?"

"That won't be necessary, Jeff. You run along and have dinner. I'll leave these Waring contracts in the control room of the Viking. I'll see you later over at Miles' apartment."

"Right, Mr. Tanner. See you later."

Bert stood in the thickening shadows as Jeff walked off. He stood there for long moments, staring up

at the towering metal shape that was the *Viking*. A slim, beautiful ship in its launching cradle. A thing of power, an artistic triumph that could carry a man to the far planets in the solar system. Or to death . . .

He glanced across the concrete apron to the nearby launching cradle where the *Space Queen* II pointed its silvery nose to the twilight heavens. A sister to the original *Space Queen*, it was smaller than the *Viking*, but a thing of beauty in its own way. He smiled to himself. Tomorrow he would have Jeff prepare the auto-pilot on the *Space Queen II* for Mars. He would have a valid reason for the trip. Afterall, he *was* going to be the best man at a wedding, wasn't he? At least, that's what they would all believe. Perfect. A perfect alibi, and could he help it if the bride and groom never arrived?

Grimly, Bert strode over to the hydraulic lift and stepped into the narrow cage. He slammed over the control lever and felt the cage lurch under his feet. Then the ground fell away and he was moving smoothly, swiftly up the side of the three hundred foot tapering hull.

MOMENTS later the cage stopped before an open airlock. Bert left it and walked into the narrow confines of the ship. He walked along the companionway to the control room. Passenger quarters on a space ship were necessarily confined to the nose of the vessel. With atomic reactors still in the lab stage, chemical propellants were still the motivating power that drove man into the void. Earlier fuel mixtures had been composed of various types: hydrazine plus nitric acid, and alcohol combined with liquid oxygen. Latest rocket fuels combined parts of both mixtures with catalytic agents to increase maximum power. Still, fuel supplies required over seventy percent of ship storage space. Thus crew or passenger quarters suffered. The auto-pilot had solved this difficulty somewhat, making a crew unnecessary. One man could safely navigate the dark reaches of interplanetary space with the auto-pilot doing the work of a five or ten man crew.

Bert made his way to the control room in the nose of the ship. He switched on the overhead light and glanced around. Everything was in order. But then, Jeff was a very thorough man. The best. Bert put the papers he carried on the forward grav bunk and strode over to the control panel.

Thoughts pounded in his head. It would be easy. So very easy. And foolproof. Jeff had said escape velo-

city thrust for ten minutes, space drive cut in at thirty minutes. That was the critical point. At cut in the catalytic agents joined with the rocket fuels to produce free space acceleration. A tricky business, but not for the auto-pilot. If the catalytic agents were cut in on escape velocity thrust, say between ten and twenty-five minutes after blastoff, the whole chemical firing balance would be thrown out of adjustment. That had happened before—before the days of the auto-pilot. In those days men had died in space. Their ship blown to a million pieces in the void as the unbalanced fuel mixture reacted with catalytic agents. A nasty way to die, but in a way merciful. The clumsy spaceman who miscalculated never knew what happened. The auto-pilot had taken the risk out of space flight.

It was now going to send Miles Berendt and Carol Grant to their death.

Bert went to work quickly, expertly. He snapped the latch lock of the control panel and laid bare the workings of the auto-pilot. A few simple adjustments, not discernible to anybody but an expert—*if* he were looking for something wrong. And then Bert was finished. He locked the control panel and smiled grimly.

Twenty minutes after blastoff the firing mixture would go out of balance as the catalysts cut in prematurely. There would be a hellish blast of flame and nothing but atoms floating in the void.

The atoms of Miles Berendt and Carol Grant.

He would make sure of that final step in a little while.

"MILES, I've come to apologize for acting like a damned fool. I don't know what else to say, except that if you and Carol will forgive me I'll do anything to make up for it."

Bert blurted the words out as he stood inside the doorway of Miles Berendt's apartment staring bravely at Miles and Carol, guilt and contrition on his face.

"I won't blame you if you kick me out, but I'm sorry, and I'd like to toast your engagement and wish you both the best . . . "

It was Carol who came around Miles and took Bert Tanner's hand firmly in hers.

"Oh, Bert, I knew you would come! I'm so happy—Miles is too, aren't you darling?"

Miles looked for a long moment at Bert's chastened face. Then he grinned and clasped his partner's hand. "Of course! Bert, you sure had me worried for awhile. I couldn't figure it out — but hell, man, I know the strain you've been

under worrying about the Deimos contract and the Viking. Come on in. By God we'll have a real party now!"

Bert grinned and returned the firm handclasp.

He walked over to an easy chair and sat down, Miles quickly mixing a drink for him. Bert laughed.

"I invited Jeff Morrow over—hoping it would be all right. Jeff was happy to hear about your engagement too."

Miles nodded. "Glad you did. Jeff's a good guy. The most efficient man we've got. When will he be here?"

"Any time now." Bert took the drink and lifted it in a toast. "Here's to the happiness of my two best friends."

They toasted and Carol turned on the vid-player. Soft dance music filled the room as the door chime sounded. Miles put his glass down.

"That must be Jeff. Be back in a moment."

Carol sat on the arm of Bert's chair. "I'm so happy, Bert. This makes everything complete. Nothing would have been the same without you."

Bert stared at her, then lowered his gaze. "And nothing would be the same without you, too, Carol. It has to be this way . . . "

She puzzled for a moment over his words, but then Miles was back and Jeff was with him.

"Come on, everybody, let's celebrate. Tonight's the night for Tanner-Berendt, and—" Miles added with a soft glance at Carol, "—the future Mrs. Berendt. Gentlemen, a toast to the bride."

They toasted.

Then Bert grinned. "Jeff, there's been a slight change in plans for blastoff at dawn. Miles and Carol are going to Deimos in the *Viking*. Sort of a wedding trip before nuptials. The ship all set for an extra passenger?"

Jeff nodded. "Certainly, Mr. Tanner. Miss Grant will find everything in order. But I thought you—"

Bert laughed again. "Oh, I'm not bowing out—afterall, the bride and groom have to have a best man, even on Deimos. That's me. I'll take the *Space Queen II*."

Carol smiled in delight. "That's a wonderful idea, isn't it, Miles?"

Miles nodded. "That would be a fine thing, Bert." He turned to Jeff. "But is the Space Queen ready for flight?"

JEFF shrugged. "Nothing to do but set the auto-pilot. An hour's work, adding final fuel supplies. I can take care of it ok."

"Then it's decided!" Carol brightened. "Bert will be best man

at our wedding on Deimos! Let's have another toast!"

They toasted. And Bert felt smugly giddy. It was perfect. The fools! With Jeff here, and everything sweetness and light, the Viking's blowup would be nothing but an accident, an unexplainable accident. Bert Tanner would be in mourning for his two closest friends, and Jeff would feel a lasting guilt that somehow he had been responsible. Perfect . . . And Bert felt a desire to get gloriously drunk. He walked over to the portable bar and made himself a healthy drink.

"Watch it, Bert, you'll have quite a hangover by the time you blastoff!" Carol chided him.

Bert laughed, pointing at Jeff. "So what? This is our night to celebrate. With the auto-pilot I can bring along a good book or a hangover! Right, Jeff?"

Jeff agreed and joined Bert in another drink.

Then there was the music. And Miles dancing with Carol. More music. More drinks until Bert lost count. But he didn't care. This was sweet, the toasting of a wake, the perfect crime, a sadly wonderful occasion. Music. He danced with Carol. He stared at her with clouding eyes, aching inside, a terrible pain that wouldn't be stilled by anything except another drink. He had one. And another.

Miles and Jeff talking together. Pointing at him. He laughed to himself. They were concerned over his getting drunk. They were concerned over *him!* That was a hot one. One for the books. One for another drink . . .

It was hot and giddy. The room was a glorious pool of laughter, savage brutal laughter inside Bert's mind. Carol, Miles. Jeff Morrow talking to them, nodding. Bert knew what they were telling Jeff. Wisps of their conversation came to him from where he half-reclined on the couch. Jeff would be his nurse-maid. Jeff would see to it that he was put aboard the *Space Queen II* in one soggy, drunken heap. Jeff would strap him to his bunk. Good old Jeff. Good old efficient Jeff. And good old considerate and concerned Miles . . . Miles who was as good as dead right now.

Music, time, liquor, they passed in a montage of fragrant clouds. Bert was aware that Carol kissed him lightly on the cheek as Jeff helped him to his feet and to the door. He was aware of Miles slapping him on the back and calling to Jeff.

"Take care of Bert, Jeff. We want him on Deimos for the contract and wedding!"

And Jeff assuring them he would. Good old Jeff.

FOG and pressure. Roaring sound that deafened his ears. Pressure that pushed him back, back, flattened his flesh tight against his bones. Pain in his head that wanted surcease with oblivion, but the pressure and roaring sound pushed the pain back, kept his consciousness aware, dimly, but aware.

And then the pressure began to ease. With the easing came a sobering effect to his alcohol-clouded brain. He became aware of his surroundings.

The roar and pressure. Rocket thrust to escape velocity. A space ship. It began to come clear now. No more music, no more drinks, no more smiling faces of Miles and Carol. Jeff taking him to the door . . . Where then? The *Space Queen II*. Of course. Good old Jeff. Nursemaid Jeff. Bundling him off to Deimos to sign a contract and be best man at a wedding.

Consciousness returned to Bert Tanner and he laughed as he pushed against the restraining straps that held him to the grav bunk.

Wedding? There would be no wedding. The bride and groom would never show up! He laughed loud and long.

Then he stopped laughing. There was something wrong. Something he must find out about. He felt it. No, that wasn't it, he didn't *feel* it, he *saw* it . . .

This grav bunk—the control room. The *Space Queen II*. Something wrong—something . . .

He turned his head on the bunk and stared at the control panel. There was a confident hum from the auto-pilot, guiding the ship, carrying it into deep space with precision and infallible accuracy of timing. The control panel—*this was not the Space Queen II!*

He knew then. Incredibly, impossibly, he knew. He was in the *Viking* . . .

The Viking!

"No! No! It can't be—Jeff—what did you do—you made a mistake—this isn't the Space Queen —"

He sobered quickly. For he knew that he didn't have much time. A few minutes—perhaps less . . . the auto-pilot—he had set it—the unbalanced fuel mixture—Miles and Carol—they should be here! *What had gone wrong?*

He struggled with the straps. The hum of the auto-pilot. The precision hum, the hum of death—death he had arranged, planned . . .

In an agony of time he tore the straps loose. He rolled groggily from his grav bunk. He staggered to the control panel. Time, he must beat time. *How much time did he have left?*

He fumbled at the latch controls

of the auto-pilot. A minute now was all he needed. One minute to divert eternity . . .

The panel opened, his fingers shook as he reached for the automatic setting.

The hum grew, a click in the electronic mechanism. He knew then it was too late. He screamed. Once. Only once. That was all he had time for. A flash of light engulfed him. A roar he didn't hear. A roar that was swallowed by the vast hunger of empty space.

The *Viking* exploded into a myriad atomic particles.

"YOU get him off all right, Jeff?"

Miles Berendt adjusted the video-screen as Jeff Morrow's face grinned back at him from the operations office on Earth. Beside Miles, Carol smiled at Jeff as she sat in the co-pilot's seat.

"Soggy, but safe, Mr. Berendt. He'll have a pleasant surprise when he wakes up and finds himself in the Viking instead of the Space Queen II."

Miles nodded. "I know he wanted to make the trip in the Viking. Besides, Carol and I prefer the Space Queen II. Makes it sort of a sentimental journey."

Carol laughed beside him. "Thanks for everything, Jeff. We'll bring you back a piece of wedding cake wrapped in a nice fat freight contract!"

Miles broke contact then and turned to Carol. She reached out and squeezed his hand affectionately.

"I'm glad everything turned out all right with Bert . . . " she said.

He nodded. "Right, honey. But enough talk. Let's relax and enjoy the trip!"

And they did.

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NOVEMBER ISSUE NOW ON SALE — FEATURING —

TOFFEE TAKES A TRIP

by

CHARLES F. MYERS

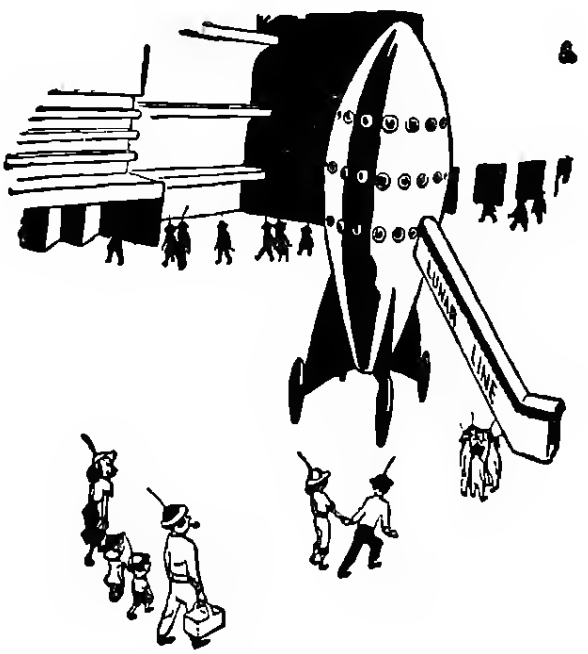
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★ Jovian Grandstand! ★

JUPITER, the Monster planet of the Solar System, is strikingly strange in many ways. Its size, its mysterious "Red Spot"—above all, its moons, cause astronomers to hesitate about its classification.

Time was when the major moons of Jupiter, Io, Europa, Ganymede and Callisto, were accompanied by six minor ones, un-named and merely numbered. But the Jovian planet is prolific. Within the last ten years at least three more of these minor moons have been discovered, and the chances are good that even more will be found! As of now, Jupiter has twelve satellites—tomorrow it may be thirteen.

For astrogators of the future, the news is good. The chances are strong that men will never land on Jupiter. Its atmosphere and fierce gravity discourage this. But the moons provide perfect observational positions and rockets will certainly stop on them someday. The four big ones are nearer planets than moons having three thousand mile diameters. Colonization of these may be expected. The small moons, ten to several hundred miles in diameter, are perfect satellite stations. Jupiter apparently has provided a perfect grandstand even if the planet itself is unapproachable!



"When I was a girl the community park was good enough for a picnic!"

Trouble Near The Sun

By

Alan J. Ramm

Bull and Skip disagreed about the merits of the Cerebus III as a space ship. But a ship's mettle — like a man's — is proved in an emergency!

THE Inner Planet Fleet's spacegoing salvage vessel *Cerebus III* leaped sidewise as though she was trying desperately to escape from some mythical monster of the spaceways. Inside the instrument filled control room the tiny group of ship's officers, gathered together by Captain Stevens' urgent order, felt their feet leave the deck. They reached wildly for any hold available, the lucky ones clinging desperately with strained muscles, the others jumbled in awkward cursing heaps against the bulkheads.

"You idiot!" Captain Stevens shouted. "Next time give us warning!"

The lateral tubes pilot grinned wryly but didn't lift his eyes from the scanner before him. "Sorry, Sir. There was no time. When one of those calcium faculae come boiling up at you like a cannonball, you pick a new spot in the chromosphere for the ship and get there quick—or you don't arrive at all."

Bull Wright, one of the two men who had been strong enough to keep his hold, slowly untwined his huge fingers from a projection and flexed them. He looked across the room and grinned down at the floor where Skip Allen was struggling to his feet. "How do you like good old Sol from that angle?" he drawled sarcastically. "Different from reading about it in a textbook, isn't it?"

The slim built Ensign quickly came to his feet and automatically adjusted the cap on his red head. "Mr. Experience talking, eh? I wonder why Headquarters hasn't discovered that Ensign Wright sees all, knows all, and blabs all?"

"Lay off it, you two," Captain Stevens ordered. "We've got a real problem this time." He paused



dramatically, waving a sheet of spacegram paper in the air. "We've been ordered to find the *Regis* and remove her crew and passengers."

"Why that's Fleet Command's new sun cruiser," Skip gasped. "What's happened to her?"

"Headquarters doesn't know exactly," Stevens replied. "They got part of a message saying her propulsion power controls were jammed and her anti-grav and anti-heat equipment was slowly losing effectiveness. They give her about four hours before she's falling too fast to contact; and about the same time before she gets too hot to maintain life.

"A laminated layer of charged particles must have whipped across her sending beam about then because her message became garbled and finally faded out."

"Rescue," growled Bull. "That's not our kind of job. We're not outfitted for it. If that bunch of stuffed shirts didn't know enough to navigate through the corona and into the chromosphere, they deserve to die. Why should we risk our necks to save them?"

"We're the only ship near enough to stand a chance of reaching them during the next couple hours. But that's not all. Alistar of Cygnus is on board."

"Alistar of Cygnus?" one of the officers questioned. "Who the hell is he?"

"An inspector from Intergalactic Federation Headquarters. Remember that container of electron stripped nuclei found in Federation Headquarters Building last month?"

The men all nodded.

"THE Federation figures it came from one of our nuclei dredges in one of Sol's spots. With all the other crazy things that have been happening lately to throw suspicion our way, our system stands in danger of being ejected from the Federation unless we can clear ourselves. You know what that would mean to our trade activities?

"That's why they've sent Alistar of Cygnus here to make a preliminary investigation. His report will determine further action. Now suppose that something happens to Alistar? They're sure to think that it's part of some plot we're concocting in this corner of the galaxy.

"We've got to find that ship and get him out. Those are our orders. We do it—or die trying."

"Simple problem," sniffed Bull derisively. "All we have to do is locate a tiny thing like that on the sun. That's easy. Only about two and a half million miles of circumference to cover."

Captain Stevens smiled. "It isn't that bad. The message that was picked up also gave a rough location. They were about 15 degrees North and near a small sunspot about 70 degrees west of the east limb of the sun as seen from Earth at the time of the message. I have plotted the coordinates. We've been on our way there ever since we began talking.

"Are there any further questions, gentlemen? Then take up your assigned duties. You are all dismissed except Ensigns Wright and Allen."

After all the others had filed out, Captain Stevens turned to the two nervously waiting officers. "I warned you two days ago to lay off. I don't mind your picking one another to pieces, but this feud of yours about the space worthiness of the Cerebus III has the whole crew upset."

Skip and Bull looked guiltily at one another. Stevens went on. "Your bantering may have been amusing to the crew for a few days out of Terra. But now they're sensitive about it, and your panning the ship is making the men nervous. Both of you know a nervous crew is nothing to have on a ship operating within the atmosphere of the sun. Even a subconscious suspicion of the worth of the Cerebus III might cause some technician to make a mistake or hesitate long enough to send everyone to his death.

"Just remember, you two," Stevens warned, "this is your first flight as Ensigns. It's strictly a probation period. A word from me can cancel out that diploma you received from Space Academy, Ensign Allen. And wipe that grin from *your* face, Mr. Wright. You may have spent the last ten years working yourself up through the ranks, but your appointment as Ensign is also subject to my report at the end of this tour of duty."

Both men, standing stiffly at attention, muttered, "Yes, sir."

"You both are officers. Now act like you're supposed to. We should sight the Regis in the next hour. I'm assigning you both to the scanning screens. The minute either of you see the Regis, let me know. I'm going to do the rounds and make sure all equipment is ready."

As soon as Stevens left, Bull and Skip went to the tiny cubbyhole called the Vision Room which was located just off Main Control. There they sat back to back in chairs fixed in the middle of the room. This gave each of them a half circle to keep track of. Between them, they had a full view of the ship's entire surroundings. Sitting there, surrounded by screens, it was

easy to imagine that they were afloat in the chromosphere without a ship deck under them.

SEVERAL times the forward motion of their ship carried them close to sunspots. These were carefully skirted before the ship entered the penumbra. The dark appearing central area of each spot, the umbra, yawned like monster pits into an area of magnetic forces that ships avoided if possible unless they were nuclei dredges or contact vessels especially constructed to enter the vortex. Twice they ran through loop-like spaces that appeared on their filtered screens. These were caused by prominences of exploding hydrogen shooting tens of thousands of miles into space. Prominences, the tips of which looped back to the sun's surface.

"By the horned three legged elephants of Callisto," muttered Bull as the ship shot through another loop. "I feel like an astronomical ball being shot through loops of an intergalactic croquet game."

As the Cerebus III skittered to the left to avoid another racing faculae, Skip felt his stomach begin to get as unsteady as the ship's deck. He groaned out loud. And for the first time since he sat down, he jerked his strained eyes from the screens only to meet Bull grinning at him.

"What's the matter, space cadet?" Bull jibbed. "Don't tell me all that training of yours didn't include a course in how NOT to get space sick?"

Skip swallowed hurriedly before he spoke. "How this garbage collecting tub can stand this buffeting, I can't figure."

"Nothing wrong with her," Bull rejoined. "Just because you thought that you'd get assigned to some fancy interstellar luxury ship when you graduated, you don't have to take out your disappointment on the Cerebus III. Stop making a good ship your alibi for —"

"That's just fancy talk," Skip interrupted. "All you're trying to do is talk yourself into thinking that this is the same as sitting on a stool in some Martian bar."

Glaring at one another across their shoulders, they slowly became aware of Captain Stevens' voice in the Vision Room doorway.

"Forget about the Regis, gentlemen?" His voice held a tempered edge that could have sliced through the million degree temperature of the corona.

Both men jerked to their screens. Off to the side they could see the Regis low in the chromosphere, hanging over the umbra of a small sunspot about ten thousand miles

away.

Steven's voice was bitter. "First you destroy the crew's morale. Now you're negligent in your assigned duty. That should be enough to wash you both out of the Inner Fleet. You're both cosmic debris the Service can do without. Stay out here in the Control Room where I can keep my eye on you. I'll attend to you both later."

Out in the control room Stevens questioned the communications man. "Get a rise out of her yet?"

"It's hopeless, sir. The interference here is too great for contact. This is actually a double spot if you look, sir. That makes communication impossible due to the reversed polarity of the spots."

Skip and Bull, standing wretchedly unwanted and useless to one side of the room, looked at the small screens on the control panel. They could see the Regis balanced precariously over the center of one spot; off in the distance another spot showed clearly—one of the best leader and follower set-ups they had ever seen.

"Getting low, aren't they, sir?" Malcolm, the Second-in-Command, asked Stevens.

"Down to about 500 miles. They must be using the magnetic field there which is perpendicular to the sun's surface to help counteract their own loss of power. They'll be in the reversing layer shortly."

"It's cooler there too," Malcolm observed. "The whirling effect of the gases sets up a low pressure that reduces the temperature to about 7000 degrees instead of the 11,000 outside the spot where we are."

"We'll have to close and hook on as soon as possible," Stevens directed. "Break out the strongest line we have. When we get within a mile, shoot her out until you contact."

"But, sir, we can't get a line out in that if we try."

"We can—and will, Mister. Follow your orders."

"Yes, sir."

THE Cerebus III edged in toward the penumbra. In the control room they staggered as the ship was caught up by the madly whirling rim atoms as they sought a passageway into the quiet area over the cooler gases surrounding the spot. Tensely the ship maneuvered its way toward the Regis.

Once they were within range, Bull and Skip could see on the screens the traction line from Cerebus III snake out toward the Regis. Time after time the line just missed. In all that chaos, making contact was worse than threading a needle with a lasso. At last the line struck and held the Regis

amidships.

A sigh oozed from every man in the control room. Stevens looked at his watch. "Two hours gone. Now for the tough part."

He called down to the outer lock room through the intership voice tubes. "We've made contact. Have the communicator tube ready to swing out of the lock when I give notice. We are going to start hauling the Regis in toward us now. Be sure that you batten all contact points tight. The men on the Regis haven't any suits to withstand the radiations of the sun. Their only chance is to walk through that tube once you get in contact. A radiation leak down there will kill them all."

Then he called the engine room. "Open up easy."

The deck of the control room began to throb with the power of the huge ionized particle engines. On the screen the traction line began to straighten between the two ships. Its still slack loop twisted like a dying snake between the forces that played over it. Then it tautened.

"It's moving toward us," Skip said aloud. No one answered him. Their eyes were too tightly fixed to the screens.

Suddenly the Cerebus III began to whip right and left. Stevens roughly pushed the pilot from his seat and made some quick moves on the controls. The yawing stopped, but when they looked at the screens, the Regis was once more at a distance, and the traction line was slack.

Stevens looked at the menacing sides of the sunspot. Actually there were no real sides—they were like the sides of a tornado in a mass of air. Here in the interior of the spot, their main problem was to balance the ship against the force of the rising column of gases from the mouth of the spot inside the sun's photosphere, and to adjust their position to the constantly downward drift of the Regis. There was a maximum distance that they could afford to let the Regis drift downward if they wished to save her. Now that they were close to the photosphere, the drag of the sun's 27 G's was greater than it had been out at 10,000 miles. If they managed to pull the Regis close enough for a transfer, it would have to be in the next hour.

"We'll have to take a chance," Stevens said.

Once more he called the engine room. "Throw them in full when I say go," he instructed.

Bull looked at Skip. He smiled and it didn't take words for his thoughts to become clear. *Now you will see some real power from a good ship.*

"Let her go."

The deck leaped to life, reacting to the blows of countless millions of quanta of light as free electrons attached themselves to the stripped nuclei in the discharge chambers of the ship's engines.

THE ship began to whip again; but the agile fingers of Captain Stevens brought her swiftly under control.

Skip smiled at Bull. His glance, too, was full of meaning. It said plainly, *this should show you that this ship isn't as good as you think it is!*

The men in the room had to hang on to the sides as the ship, the sun and Captain Stevens fought a duel with one another for control of the Cerebus III and the Regis.

The thin traction line stretched taut once more between them. How much strain could it take? flashed though Skip's mind. Then one torn end seemed to be floating toward the Cerebus III, the other floated toward the Regis.

For a split second the Cerebus III seemed to hang in space. Then everyone was flung violently in all directions as the force of the Cerebus III's engines on full power, plus the reaction of the ship's freedom from the drag of the Regis, shot the salvage vessel into space and plastered the crew against the nearest bulkheads.

Skip came unwillingly back to consciousness. Some of the control room crew were already on their feet. Others were still lying quietly trying to regain their senses before they tried to get to their feet. A few of the men would never move again.

The thrum of the engines had stopped.

Captain Stevens was cursing silently in front of the controls. "Fouled," he spat. "That damn line must have whipped right into the stern discharge tubes and sealed them up so that we have no forward propulsive power. And look out there." He waved his arm at the screens.

The ship had been flung thousands of miles out from its former position. Once more it appeared to be on the outer edge of the chromosphere. The Regis was not in sight. The constantly changing view in the vision panels indicated that the Cerebus III was spinning.

This Captain Stevens corrected while speaking to the men. "Clean up the mess in here. Get the injured to the sick bay; and take care of the dead. We're in the same difficulty as the Regis. Our anti-grav and anti-heat units are working but the indicators show them losing power slowly.

We must free those tubes or sooner or later we'll end up in the sun. Let's get down to the outer lock room and see what we can do."

Bull and Skip followed the rest through the big ship. When they got to the lock room, Malcolm, his face white with pain from some injury, was struggling into a solar suit. One of the crew snapped the helmet over his head and handed him a cutting torch. Before any of the new arrivals could say a word, Malcolm was in the lock and on his way outside.

Suddenly one of the lock tenders exclaimed. "My God, he took a suit with a discharged anti-heat unit filler. If his refrigerant cuts off while he's out there—"

Bull grabbed another suit from its peg and began to draw it on. Captain Stevens grabbed his arm and shouted.

"Hold it, Ensign, you're under arrest. We'll send—"

"There's a man out there," interrupted Bull. "You said this was do or die, didn't you? Let me go."

Stevens tightened his grip. "Listen you big fool—"

BULL shoved hard. The Captain hit the deck and rolled to the nearest bulkhead. No one said a word. There were too many other things to worry about. A fouled discharge system. A man outside about to die unless someone got to him in time.

Bull slammed the inner lock door shut and opened the outer lock. For a moment he drew back. Although he had been spacing for ten years, this was his first trip into the sun's area. In spite of the filters in his viewing plates, the sun looked like a nightmare. Here where the view was unobstructed, the prominences could be seen in their full terror and the boiling jets of flaming gas seemed ready to reach out and pluck him off the side of the Cerebus III. It took all his will power to step outside the lock and look around for the Second-in-Command. Malcolm was almost to the rear of the ship, making his way slowly. Bull moved out after him.

Suddenly Bull's whole front view seemed filled with an explosion. He clung desperately to the ship although he knew that there would be no perceptible effect of such a small explosion in space. He did not have to look to see what had happened; he knew. Malcolm was gone.

At least it had been quick and painless, thought Bull. Malcolm's heat unit had failed. And in such a high temperature the change from a solid to a gas had been so sudden that it was actually an explosion.

After swallowing hard several times he slowly began to make his way to the stern. It was up to him to clear the tubes now.

He tried to throw the spectacle of Malcolm's disintegration from his mind; but it kept intruding. He had seen many men die; but none so quickly or so completely. The whole sun was now Malcolm's grave. His very atoms were being torn asunder by the constant process of ionization that was taking place in the sun's atmosphere. Somehow the thought of such complete disembodiment was disturbing to Bull's ideas of immortality.

He was jerked crudely back to reality when the ship came up with unbelievable force to flatten him immovably on its side for a moment. While he gasped for breath under the unexpected pressure, he sought madly for an explanation of his predicament. As the pressure slowly lessened, he realized that the ship must have drifted into one of the many clouds of gas constantly expanding or contracting near the sun due to differences in temperature. This time a rising mass had pressed him against the ship. The lateral jet pilots inside were not compensating for the shift because he was outside and a sudden movement might leave him drifting free.

Once he could get to his feet and proceed, he was extra careful to place his magnetized shoes firmly to the ship's shell. In addition, he set out helper lines to act as auxiliary anchors against any unexpected moves the ship might take. When the possibility of a faculae nearing the ship entered his mind, it took his breath away. If that occurred, he knew that the ship's crew would have to throw in the lateral jets to escape. Unless his equipment was in place at the time of the move, the suddenness of the change in direction would leave him free in the chromosphere until his power ran out; or the faculae the ship had been escaping clasped him and exploded him into another Malcolm.

With his mind trampled with fear, and his eyes fixed firmly to the ship's shell, he was surprised to find himself suddenly within reach of the stern tubes. The long traction line had whipped across the four tubes with a force that had annealed parts of the line to both the inside and outside so that the openings were completely covered. This caused the forces in the firing chambers to neutralize themselves since there was no aperture to permit the egress of force in any direction.

Making sure that all his possible anchorage was in place, he braced himself and began burning

out the clogged tubes nearest to him.

BACK in the Vision Room the crew aniously watched bits of metal slough off under Bull's torch.

"That guy's sure got what it takes," someone whispered.

Skip spoke without thinking. "He sure has. I guess he meant what he said about the Cerebus III."

Outside, Bull cleaned out the second tube and reached across without thinking to start cutting on number three. Forgetting that he had pulled all his lines as taut as possible, and that a move in the wrong direction would pull some of them free, he felt his feet break loose and in seconds he was floating twenty feet from the ship with only one line connecting him to safety.

Skip spotted him floating clear, but Captain Stevens shouted. "He's almost free. And he won't dare try to haul himself in by that one line or he might tear it loose, too. He's lucky if some of the eddies around the ship don't do that anyway."

Skip made no comment but started for the outer lock room on the double. By the time the rest had figured what he was up to, he was already in a suit and had shut the lock door behind him. Remembering Bull's trouble on the way along the shell, Skip carefully put out his lines and made as much speed as possible. He didn't dare to look to see if Bull was still out there, or if he had broken free. When the tubes were reached, he looked up and drew a deep breath —Bull was still o.k. Bracing himself carefully, Skip drew in on Bull's line foot by foot. Since it was firmly attached at Bull's suit, there was no danger of it pulling out at that point. At last Bull was along side of Skip.

Once more firmly attached to the ship, Bull slumped against it momentarily. It was impossible to communicate between the suits; and the filters in the helmets didn't permit a look into one another's faces.

When Bull looked up after catching his breath, Skip was already at work on the remaining tubes. Placing himself alongside Skip, he added his torch to the work.

Splinter by splinter, chunk by chunk they burned away the traction line debris. To get the tubes completely free, one of them had to climb into the tubes. Bull did this. The hard work in the confined space of the suits caused sweat to pour from their every pore.

Bull was reaching for one of the last scraps of metal when he no-

ticed that his suit was getting hot. The metal fittings in his hands were becoming too warm to hold. In sudden panic once more he remembered Malcolm. Was his own anti-heat unit becoming depleted? Scuttling out of the tube, he found Skip waiting for him. Looking around, the sight which met his eyes didn't at first register. They could no longer see the sun. *They seemed part of it.*

There could be only one explanation. Their work must have taken longer than it seemed. During that time the ship had drifted downward until it was now well within the vortex of a spot. Since the sides seemed to be pressing all around him, the ship was probably within the photosphere. Unless they escaped ot once, they would not get away. He began to work his way back toward the lock; Skip following.

Inside the ship Captain Stevens looked anxiously at his instrument panel. Sweat broke out on his forehead. They couldn't wait any longer. He reached for the firing control.

A gasp came from one of the men in the room. "You can't, sir. Not after what they have done."

Stevens instinctively began to withdraw his hand, then stopped. "I must," he whispered. "It's them or all of us. There is no choice."

His hand plunged down on the firing control.

Outside, Bull had been placing his anchor lines carefully as he went along. He kept slightly behind Skip, making sure that all his lines were in place if Skip's weren't. There was no doubt in his mind as to what Captain Stevens would do when he found that he had to make a choice between the two of them dying or the whole crew. Bull knew that the lines would hold against the thrust of the ship's engines. But would they hold both he and Skip? What is more, would he be able to grab that crazy space cadet that had saved his life, before the ship's momentum tore the kid away and beyond reach?

He had little time to conjecture. His feet felt the ship's shell take life. Snaking out his hands as rapidly as his reflexes allowed, he grabbed Skip around the waist with both arms. Instantly the full force of the ship's new direction and Skip's inertia fought a battle centered on Bull's shoulder joints. Long before his bones slipped from their shoulder sockets, Bull felt the pain of tensed and torn muscles course down his sides and chest. He heard himself screaming far away in his own helmet. But he held on. And then he lost consciousness.

LATER. Much later; Bull woke to find himself lying in a bed in the hospital bay of the ship. His arms were stretched high over his head; held firmly in splints under tension.

"So you've decided to come to, eh?"

Bull turned his head to look at the bandaged figure in the next bed.

"Kind of hard to recognize, I guess."

The voice was familiar. "How come all those fancy bandages, Space Cadet?"

Skip's voice was bitter and self-accusing. "Space Cadet is right. I was outside working on those tubes and never noticed we were getting close to the sun. I must have got a full dose of heat. How dumb can a guy get?"

There was a silence between them. Then Bull spoke. "You saved my life out there, Skip. I couldn't have pulled myself in. That took guts. Thanks."

"What do you call that last act of yours? There isn't another man on this ship that could— or would —have held on with those arms like that."

Both men looked at one another. There would be times when experience and formal education might conflict in the future; but the remarks would never have an edge that mutual admiration wouldn't dull.

"Admiring one another's bravery?"

Both men shifted their eyes to the doorway where Captain Stevens stood. Resentment rose in both of them. Did he have to call them down and rub it in at a time like this?

"Well? What have you got to say for yourselves?"

Bull, realizing that there was no sense in trying to condone what he had done, answered with the first thing that popped into his mind.

"Too bad we didn't reach the Regis, sir."

"But we sure tried," Skip added. "The ship's crew gave everything it had. If we couldn't do it, it couldn't be done."

"Nothing to say for yourselves?" Stevens persisted.

"I guess not, Sir," Skip answered for both of them.

Captain Stevens walked over and stood in the space between their beds. "Both of you seem to have missed an important point; in spite of all your experience—and all your learning."

Bull and Skip were puzzled.

"When that line from the Cerebus III to the Regis let go, what happened to us?" Stevens asked.

"Why, we were flung from here

to trouble," Bull exclaimed.

Skip's face screwed up into a frown under his bandages. Then he let out a sigh of relief. "Of course."

"Of course what, book boy?" Bull asked irritatedly.

"Look," Skip explained. "If you pull a piece of string with a steady tension on both ends, what happens when it breaks? That's right. Objects at *both* ends are flung apart."

"So the Regis was flung out of that spot the same as we were," Bull said in amazement.

"That's right," Captain Stevens agreed. "And she was able to hang on in her new position until another rescue ship reached her. She's safe. Alistar of Cygnus is O. K., too."

"So the Federation and the System are happy," Skip added. "Everything seems to have worked out but us. And we're just plain out."

Captain Stevens looked at them. "Some men," he said, "are like a good ship—like the Cerebus III for instance. They don't show what they're worth until they've had some of the polish and shine rubbed off. Isn't that so, Allen?"

Skip nodded mutely.

"Other men," Stevens continued, "are afraid that someone might know more than they do. Don't you agree, Wright?"

Bull's eyes were taking on a new light.

"What I really came here for, Ensigns, was to find out when you two figure that you'll be able to pick up your duties as regular Officers of the Cerebus III? I like to keep good men like you with me."

Bull and Skip looked at one another and grinned.

THE END

FEATURED NEXT MONTH:—

REVOLT OF THE OUTWORLDS

by

MILTON LESSER

Mars had little water to begin with, certainly not enough to support life as we know it. So the space-warp to Venus was perfected, giving Mars both water and a thriving colony. Then suddenly the water was cut off—and the trouble began! Reserve your copy at your newsdealer today, or better yet—

SEE PAGE 130 FOR FREE BOOK-SUBSCRIPTION OFFER!

Eight Million Dollars From Mars!

By Winston Marks

Pauker had killed ten men to get eight million dollars. Now his flight to Mars would insure his safety from justice. Or would it?

HIS poise was perfect as he crossed the concourse with the highly vaulted ceiling. He moved with purpose but not in haste, his arms swinging freely, eyes straight ahead. At his heels, the squat, robot luggage-carrier dutifully followed the "bone" which he carried in his right hand.

At the long baggage counter, the husky, human attendant took the "bone" and led the carrier under the counter through the low passage onto a platform scale. He whistled. "That'll be $4,175.00 excess baggage," he said.

Pauker nodded curtly and withdrew his billfold. He lay his ticket and the currency on the counter while the attendant clipped paper tags to the handles of his four bags, broke off the stubs at the perforations, shoved the luggage off the cart onto a moving belt and replaced the "bone" in its "homing" slot. The three-wheel robot rolled off the scales, out the short tunnel under the counter and headed back for the entrance.

"We don't see many leather bags here," the man said pleasantly. "They weigh up too much."

Pauker's eyes darted to the man's face nervously as he examined the ticket and made change. Was there suspicion in the young, bland features?

The traveler was well aware of the extravagance of his heavy bags, and he knew that most interplantary trippers used the lightest, flimsiest containers to remain under the 100-pound limit. At the risk of appearing conspicuous, Pauker had decided on the stronger suit-cases. There must be no chance of an accidental rupture of his luggage. Legitimate people don't haul bundles of $1,000 interplanetary bills around with them—not eight million dollars worth.

But it wasn't the young man's remark that broke his composure. It was the sight of his four bags



bouncing along the endless belt and disappearing through an arch into the next room. Suppose customs got nosey?

Normally, his research had revealed, only a cursory X-ray for weapons was made, and he had delayed checking them through until the last moment, so it was unlikely they would hold them up. Yet the fear clutched his belly. He snatched at the baggage tags, his ticket and change, jammed them in his valuables pouch which was fastened to his belt, and moved hastily out of the depot.

Signs guided him to the line of waiting vehicles, and in two minutes he was deposited at the base of the portable, fourstory, passenger prep-building that sidled parallel to the space-ship.

HE surrendered his ticket at the ground-level door and was passed into the men's disrobing room. Naked, except for the waterproof, web belt to which he attached his pouch of personal effects, he folded his clothing into the transparent bag with his berth number stamped on it, dropped it in a marked hopper and stepped into the showers.

More signs led him through the soapy, sluicing bath chamber that smelled mildly of phenol, through a gusty, hot drying room, and into the corridor of innoculation booths. It was an ingenious maze of tiny spaces. You stepped in, placing your feet on the painted foot-prints, slipped the steel I.-D. plate containing your metabolic data into the slot, and *click*, a measured dose of anti-this-or-that serum shot from a compressed air needle and penetrated the proper area of the body without breaking the skin.

Pauker marvelled at the speed with which he moved down the row of booths. The sliding exit panel from one booth into another remained closed until the shot was completed, then flipped open, and you moved on, untouched by human hands. The shots were painless, a mere prickling sensation, and Pauker compared it to the brutal hypo-punching he had endured in his youth during military basic training.

By the time he reached the last of the seven booths he was relaxing. The mechanism of murder, robbery and escape which he had spent five years planning had functioned perfectly. From the pull of the trigger to the present moment, the operation was a tribute to his genius of cencentrating scrupulous attention to every minute detail. Now he was beginning to enjoy the peace of mind that comes to a craftsman when his work of art nears completion, and he knows success is positive.

As inside man on the fabulous Brinks-Interplanetary robbery, it had been necessary to accomplish a very expensive identity change when he dropped out of sight. Over $20,000 of his own savings, spot cash, had been invested beforehand setting this up. But his biggest risk had been in the double-cross. It was his biggest risk, and also his greatest stroke of brilliance.

Staging the rendezvous with his seven underworld accomplices for the pay-off, he had arranged that they arrive separately. Each in his

individual hideout, had thought it would be a general get-together at the same place, same hour. Each arrived promptly at a different time at a different rented flat, but all collected the same lethal payment something less than an ounce of soft lead.

Ten men had died to bring the fortune into Pauker's hands, three guards and seven hoodlums. And each had been marked from the beginning. Now there were no witnesses, no loose-ends, no chances of meeting an avenging gangster on Mars, no waiting for a slug in the dark. Neat! Clean! Perfection as he'd planned.

The entry panel to booth seven clicked behind him, he slipped the I. D. plate into its slot and felt the sting pluck at his neck as the serum, drug or whatever needled into his tissues. As he started to step from the painted foot-marks a voice came hollowly over the partitions, then louder as the exit door of the booth slid back.

Standing down the hall some ten paces were two men profiled to him. One was the young, blond baggage man. He was saying, "—with a red scar under his left eye. You sure you haven't seen him? It's quite import—"

Pauker, shrinking back in the booth, couldn't get entirely out of view. He jammed his I. D. plate in the slot again, and the exit panel closed. He exhaled a stale breath with trembling relief and leaned against the wall. The voices continued, muffled by the partition, but he could only catch a few words.

"—sorry—blastoff in six minutes —thing about it—not your responsibility."

Then it was quiet. Pauker waited a full minute before he began tugging at the exit door. It refused to open. A siren screamed faintly outside, and a voice boomed a warning down the corridor, "Clear the prep chamber. Blast off in four minutes."

PAUKER fought back his panic. When the smooth, featureless panel failed to open he stepped back to the hypo machine, winced slightly as the second shot hit him in the same spot, precisely, and then he moved swiftly through the panel which fell away, down the corridor, over the covered ramp into the men's gallery of the spaceship.

A white-uniformed, male attendant hurried him down an aisle of sponge-padded double-decker bunks, after a quick glance at his I. D. "You almost missed the boat, mister," he said as he strapped Pauker down. He slid the needle into an arm vein with an apology.

"Sorry, no time for a local."

Pauker didn't complain. His heart was pounding noisily, and he was much too upset to notice the stab in his arm. It was the nutrient tube which would feed him for some nine months in space.

When the male nurse was gone, Pauker realized that a small speaker by his ear was talking to him, softly, reassuringly, and after he heard and felt the lump of closing hatches, he began listening.

The voice was finishing a description of the bubble-cities of Mars. "And of the sixteen metropolitan centers, Marsfield, of course, is the luxury spot of the planet. The spaceport is located there, and all passengers clear through this lovely city of recreation. Even if your business takes you on to the other cities, don't fail to pause in Marsfield and enjoy the City of Beauty and Pleasure," the soft, feminine voice urged.

He wouldn't fail to pause, Pauker reflected. Marsfield was his destination. And now it looked like he'd really make it. That damned baggage man had given him a bad moment. There was no red scar on his left cheek, but his over-sensitive imagination had screamed that Customs had opened his bags and sent this man down to search for him. Obviously, the baggage man had been looking for another passenger, and there had been no necessity to retreat into booth seven for concealment.

Oh well, he thought, if he made no worse errors than this he could look back at a rather faultless operation. An extra shot of some serum might give him a stiff neck or a headache, but this was a minor thing, and it served him right for losing his head.

The purring voice in his ear expertly seduced his attention. He knew it was part of the departure routine to dispel nervousness of the several hundred passengers aboard, some of whom were bound to be claustrophobes. The close-packing of humanity was necessary, of course, from space limitations. So were the arrangements for keeping them immobile on the whole trip.

This was no ocean liner where you could wander about, swim and play shuffle-board. You bought your ticket, lay down and played dead for nine months. It was part of the contract.

On the other hand, as the girl was explaining, "All possible care has been taken for your safety and comfort. We are about to blast-off now, and during early acceleration I will continue talking to you, explaining the many answers to the questions that occur in most people's minds."

THE first vibration seemed to start in his own chest, and the frequency was so low that he felt, rather than heard it. Then the gentle motion of departure pressed him deeper and deeper into the soft mattress. The acceleration increased in easy stages so that each breath he drew seemed only slightly more difficult than the last. The skin of his neck and face pulled taut, and his lips flattened against his teeth.

"Continue taking deep, slow breaths," the voice advised. "There is no need for any concern, because your pre-flight physical examination determined that you are well fitted to withstand the slight discomforts of space-travel. The several injections you received included carefully measured doses of narcotics designed to make your journey more pleasant.

"One injection relaxes all your muscles, which, in turn, lowers your metabolism and makes intravenous feeding adequate. You will know no hunger or nausea, even when we go into free flight."

There had been no change in the voice at blast-off, and Pauker realized it must be recorded. It was all he could do to keep from swallowing his tongue. Talking would have been impossible. They relaxed your muscles, all right. It amounted to virtual paralysis!

Her spiel was clever, though. Rather than trying to lure people from thinking about their bodies, which would be virtually impossible, the woman's message dwelled on their sensations, making them sound normal. She enumerated the purposes of the seven innoculations, one by one, describing the immunities gained, and explaining the purposes of the several drug injections.

"In booth six," she said, "you received a mild narcotic which will allow you to drift into a time-consuming slumber if you so desire at any time. The nature of this drug is to invoke a feeling of extreme well-being, and the dreams that usually result are not dissimilar to the old opium dreams of the orient.

"The slumber is shallow, however, and you may retrieve your senses from the torpor at any moment with the slightest concentration."

Pauker was sweating profusely. Stuffy, he thought. No, just warm. There was a slowly moving flood of fresh air flowing over the whole length of his naked body, but it seemed rather hot. The sweat oozed out heavily to bathe his body, then the warm, very dry air began evaporating it. Now the breeze felt delicious and cool.

Even as he wondered how the ship adjusted the air temperature to his own needs the female voice

launched into an explanation.

"Perhaps the most interesting injection you received was the thermal adjustment retardation drug. At this moment many of you are experiencing delightful sensations of changing temperature. If you are too warm, the moving air will seem cool as an ocean breeze. When your skin cools, almost to the point of chill, then the air will seem to turn warm and cozy.

"Actually, the temperature of the air is held carefully at 98.6 degrees, Fahrenheit, the exact temperature of the normal human body. This is to help minimize your bodies' matabolism, or fuel consumption."

THESE people thought of everything. Pauker wondered how many tons of food-stuffs they saved having to haul just by this one device.

"A single unfortunate effect was found from this close temperature control, however. Space-medical records revealed that if the body is permitted to adjust to a single temperature over too long a period, the body mechanism for its own heat-control becomes, you might say, rusty. That is, when the passenger passes from the ship intc the varying temperatures of normal living, his body has difficulty taking over the job of thermal control again.

"Excessive respiratory ailments such as flu, colds and pneumonia, prompted the use of our present system. Since it was deemed necessary to keep the body thermal adjustment equipment functioning, each passenger now receives a minute injection of a retardation drug that has the desired effect. This drug creates a slight lag between the time of heat sensation and the beginning of perspiration.

"The body is allowed to sense an accumulation of heat, which finally triggers the sweat glands into producing a slight oversupply of skin moisture. The moving, dry air then evaporates this perspiration which continues to flow a brief period *after* optimum sensation is reached. Thus, the body begins to experience the first sensation of chill—even though the temperature of the air remains at 98.6 degrees. At this point, the reaction lag expires and the perspiration stops, the body is warmed as if bathed in hotter air again.

"This gentle oscillation between sensations of warmth and coolness has a very pleasant secondary effect, you will find. The varying temperature of your skin is too slight to be dangerous, yet it breaks the tactile monotony which nine months of unchanging climate would bring."

Pauker's teeth chattered together

as the chill swept over him. This is all very goddamned neat when it works, he thought miserably, but how do you turn off the sweat?

His body had long since passed the comfort point, yet the sweat was still flooding from his pores, and the gentle zephyr from the air-conditioning seemed more like an autumn gale with a tang of winter in it. Chills ran his vertical length and radiated from his spine. Worse yet, as the paralysis drug took effect, he was even robbed of the pleasure of shivering. The chatter of his teeth stopped, but the swirling dankness flowed through his body unchecked.

The girl's voice paused a moment. "We are now entering maximum acceleration phase. It is suggested that you concentrate on sleep. We will continue the discussion when we reach free flight."

Pauker gratefully tried to sink into the promised, narcotic slumber as his mattress became firmer and firmer under him, but it was long, miserable, frozen minutes before the ship's motion came to his aid and blacked him out.

Free flight!

HE snapped to consciouness and instantly recoiled from the discomfort. To his surprise it wasn't the cold, now, but a dry, throat-rasping, all-pervading heat that almost suffocated him. Sometime during his unconsciousness his body had overtaken the thermal adjustment lag and turned off the perspiration. Now he felt the ravages of an uncontrolled fever. His mind wandered and refused to admit him to the promised dream-state again. He thought he heard a voice. Yes, there was a voice, the voice of the woman again.

"We are in free-flight," she announced with cheerful redundancy. "Now you will begin to enjoy the full benefits of the rhythmic thermal changes, since you are all floating freely under the loose bindings of your couches. As we were discussing, the drug which—"

Again the voice cut off, but this time a male voice clicked in on the circuit. "Attention all male passengers. Now hear this, all male passengers: Will the gentleman who has a red scar on his left cheek please report to the purser immediately upon arrival at Marsfield? When you checked your bag you forgot to pick up your baggage check. Attention all—"

While the message was repeated, Pauker smiled grimly to himself with the memory of the shock he had received when the baggage man had appeared in the passageway. So this was the reason? Some blundering fool had walked off without his baggage check, and the atten-

dant had rushed aboard in search of him.

He wondered how anyone could be so stupid. Of course, everyone didn't place the same value on his luggage.

The heat continued to build up in his fevered body until suddenly the dam broke, and sweat fairly gushed from him. The relief was tremendous but only momentary.

The girl's voice came on again, apparently with the flick of a recorder, play-back switch, "—gives such fine regulation of the body's thermal lag is a relatively new development in space travel. Before its advent, passengers invariably arrived at their destination with high irritability from the thermal monotony.

"So the delightful comfort you now enjoy is just one more modern service rendered by your host, the progressive Delta Spaceways Corporation, Interplanetary.

"This being the last shot you received—in booth number seven—we will now move on to a description and explanation of the free-flight sensations you are now experience—"

Booth number seven!

The significance finally soaked into Pauker's mind. Booth number seven was where he had fled for concealment and received a double dose of drug injection! It was no wonder he was suffering the excessive lag in thermal adjustment!

Already, the comforting coolness of the moving air on his sweat soaked body was becoming too sharp. The chill rippled up from his groin, raised the hackles of his neck-hair and diffused into his limbs like a gelid syrup. A trickle of mucous dropped from his nasal passages and stung his throat. He tried to roll his head, to hawk. It was hopeless. The lassitude that held his limbs prevented the smallest motion.

ONLY his breathing seemed within his control, and a minute later he was fervently grateful. A bubble gathered deep in his trachea, and he coughed. The irritation increased, and he coughed again, a dry, hacking cough.

What kind of torment had he let himself in for, he wondered? Was he forced to lie here shivering or roasting for nine months?

Another spasm of dry coughing shook him, and when it was over the first hunger pang stabbed his stomach.

Hunger? They had said the intravenous feeding would prevent any symptoms of hunger.

Yes, Pauker, he reasoned, *but the feeding was based on your metabolism tests and the assumption that your temperature was swinging be-*

tween narrow limits. And it didn't account for the energy you are using coughing!

The chill grew deeper, sharper, and then he thought of the sleep narcotic. He concentrated on sleep, and finally as the cold increased he managed to slip into a shallow stupor. It was of mere seconds' duration, however. His sweat stopped, his skin dried and the heavy, wonderful warmth bathed him again. It was too delicious to waste on sleep.

The warmth soaked into his bones slowly, deliciously, but now the interval between his spasms of coughing grew shorter. The period of comfort was brief, for the coughing ran up his temperature, and now the hunger in his belly was beginning to become a source of major discomfort.

Then came the thirst. The excessive loss of body fluids slowly desiccated his tissues, and the thirst grew. And the power to perspire was lost to him, and the salt of his past heavy sweats caked in his pores and itched.

The incipient pneumonia was held in check by his extreme fever, but the hacking, dry cough continued, keeping him awake and painfully aware of the pleurisy pains.

The hunger, the thirst, the itch, the cough, the pain, the fever—the grating struggle for every breath through his tortured, parched throat.

Pauker was not religious, but he prayed to God for life, then he prayed to the devil for death, and as the kaleidoscope of pain neared the limits of his conscious endurance, he cursed the drugs that kept the spark of life alive inside his screaming body; he bent all his powers of concentration on a futile attempt to wrench his arm free of the miserly, intravenous needle; he tried holding his breath, swallowing his tongue, willing himself to oblivion. To no avail.

His last fully rational observation was to glare at the miniature chronometer, mounted above his face. It registered the elapsed time in days, hours and minutes.

He stared at it with sunken, inflamed eyes. It was, of course, out of order. For it registered only an absurd ten days, six hours and fourteen minutes since blast-off—

* * *

"Astonishing!" the Marsfield Surgeon-General exclaimed. "Simply astonishing the survival power you people have given your passengers with this new drug combination. See here," he prodded Pauker's emaciated ribs. "He still reacts to stimulus. Good as dead, yet I doubt that he fully lost consciousness the whole trip!"

What does a boy do when he meets a danger from another world? Should he run for help—or fight bravely as he comes face to face with—

The Frightful Ones

by

Richard Maples

RIGHT then he was the scardest he'd ever been in his life. Yet even as he watched the spaceship turning within the glow of its flaring jets, he kept thinking of his father's warning:

"A boy's duty, son, is to keep his eyes and ears open and to give the alarm. We must be alerted. . . or we're doomed."

It had been drummed into him ever since the landing and explosion of the rockets. He'd been very little then and it was hard to understand. But they'd explained it carefully — over and over again.

The rockets were a test. They'd been fired by beings on another planet. Some day the beings themselves would come to invade.

He'd often thought about it — especially at night in bed. And he'd dreamed about it, too. Horrible dreams. And now the dreams had come true!

Trembling, he watched the silver hulk aim its jets at the ground and begin to come down. It slipped past him with a roar. Its fires reddened the hillside. It settled with a jarring thud. Then all was silence.

Edging forward, he peered down into the glen. The dust and smoke was clearing and he could see most of the ship gleaming evilly in the twilight. . .

Others, he thought, must have seen or heard the landing. Soon they'd come to fight off the invaders. He'd be found, quivering with fear, and branded a coward. He must do something. . .

A sudden metallic clanging made him jump. A light flicked on. He sucked a deep breath. The beings!

They stood on a platform next to a trap-door. Three of them: squat, fat, and silvery-white. . .like

the insects he often found under flat rocks.

One held the light. The other two carried strange looking boxes. They made their way down a ladder and began to set up the boxes on the ground. This was his chance, he told himself. While they were busy, he could climb to the top of the hill and escape down the other side.

But he'd only taken three steps when he stubbed his toe on a rock jarred it loose, and sent it pelting into the glen.

They hurried over to see what it was and he got a better look at them. Their wrinkled skin hung from their bulgy bodies in thick folds. Insect feelers waved over their humped backs. Flat expressionless faces glittered in the light of their lamp. . .He shuddered.

After they'd looked at the rock, two of them started climbing in the direction from which it had rolled. The third stayed behind, beaming the light to guide the way.

Cringing against the hill, he moved along the ledge to a point where it curled past a jutting crag On the other side of that he'd be hidden from view and could make a run for it.

But as soon as he'd made it, he gasped, horror-stricken. . .The vague shadow of the ledge pinched inward till it became the gulfing black of a sheer cliff. He was trapped!

His only hope now was the coming of the town people and he listened for noises of their approach. But all he heard was the scuffle of two beings cresting the ledge.

Was it possible that he alone knew of the landing? The town people should have come by now.

As it was, a lot of lives depended on him. His father and mother, the other kids, and all the people, too. He couldn't let them down!

The beam of light, moving along the ledge ahead of the two beings, now touched the crag and spilled over to where he stood. Then, almost as if Fate had taken charge again, his eyes were drawn to the gleam of a sharp-edged rock. . .

He was gripping it, poised to strike, when the first of the beings came around the bend.

Two things made him hestitate. First, size. The being was tiny — fully a third shorter than himself.

Next, the way the being acted. It had stopped and raised its hand, palm out, as if trying to make friends.

IT must be a trick, he told himself. Never had he heard the beings spoken of as friends — only as vicious destroyers. He took a tighter grip on the rock.

Now he noticed something that filled him with a new loathing. He'd been wrong about their appearance. The sagging skin was really a bulky suit. The big head a helmet. And back of the helmet's face he could see the actual being. He felt like vomiting.

He bashed the rock against the faceplate. It webbed with a cluster of tiny cracks. He struck again and again, until the helmet split open and he was pulping the face itself to a reddish smear. . . .

Suddenly a roaring filled his ears. His side was laced with terrible pain. He reeled backward. Saw the second of the beings pointing at him with something long and rodlike. He flipped the rock.

It caught the being in the chest and drove it over the side. He could see it clawing the air all the way down to the glen.

There, the third being, with the light, took one look at the still form, turned and raced madly for the ship.

Watching, he was overcome with a peculiar feeling of excitement. The pain in his side had ebbed and he felt hot and feverish. He wanted to do something — to act. Without thinking, he scurried down the hill and took after the fleeing figure.

He caught it on the ladder, just below the trap-door, grabbed its leg, and jerked. It plunged to the ground and hit with a crash. The light blinked out.

Now he heard a thin grating noise. Above him the trap-door, dimly outlined by a light from a cubbyhole beyond, had begun to move. He swung himself to the platform, dove into the cubbyhole, and heard the trap clang shut behind him.

Straight ahead was a short length of ladder and overhanging it a second trap-door which had already begun to gape open. This, he guessed, was some sort of airlock — a way of getting in and out of the ship without losing the built up pressure. It would account for the suits worn on the outside.

The trap had swung wider and he could see two beings in suits getting ready to come down. They probably were trying to help their buddies.

He got the first one as it started down the ladder with its back to him. He just threw an arm around its helmet and pulled until he heard a snap.

Then he went up the ladder to get at the second one. He hit it, watched it spin across the chamber, crunch against the bulkhead, and collapse.

Now a third one darted away from a bank of levers and tried to reach the spiral stairs, rising to the

next level. It wore no suit and its thin body made him think of some horrible creeping plant. He leapt for it, clutched the skinny neck with one hand, and squeezed.

He rushed to the bank of levers, then, and pushed one after another until he heard the scraping of the lower trap-door and the hiss of escaping air.

When he climbed to the upper levels, all the beings were dead except two. He found a short piece of metal and hit them both on the head.

And now his side had begun to ache and he felt bruised and shaky and very weary. He must get back to town. . .tell them what he'd done. . .bring them to look. . .

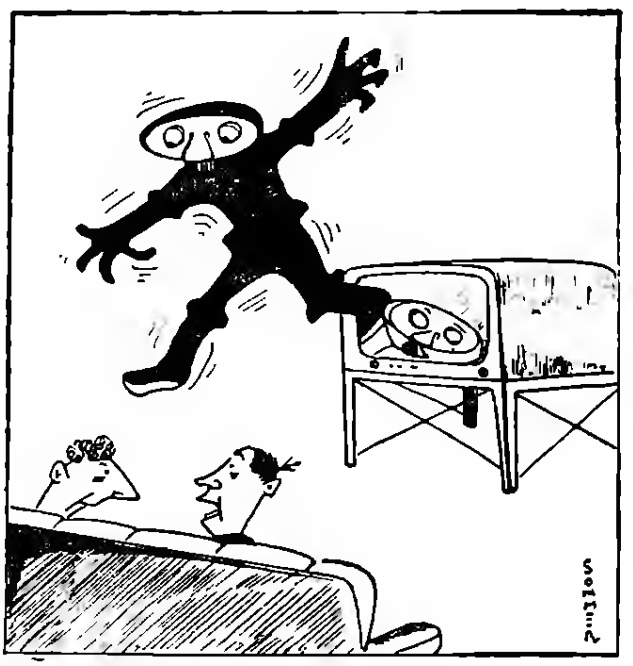
But he should take something back with him to prove the ship was there. He noticed a bright piece of metal sunk into the bulk head. It was covered with symbols . . .a sort of nameplate.

Grasping it with the thin, flat part of two hands, he braced himself against the bulkhead with his other two hands and ripped it loose.

On the way back, he memorized the shape of the symbols. He might want to draw them sometime to show off:

Taggert Steel Company, Cleveland, Ohio, U. S. A.

THE END



"Those science fiction programs get better each year!"

The Missing Disclaimer

By

Sam Sackett

Holderness' editorial error cost him his job — but it also created a serious problem for K-17. As an invader had he walked into a trap?

MR. Young came bounding into the office of *Atomic Science Stories,* waving a copy of the first issue in his hand. He stopped at the desk of the editor, Art Holderness.

"Holderness," he roared, his chins quivering, "you're fired!"

Holderness looked up in surprise. "Why?" he asked.

"Look at this contents page!"

Holderness looked at it. "What's the matter with it?"

"Don't you see anything wrong?"

"No. What shouldn't be there?"

"There isn't anything shouldn't be there, you idiot. There's something missing!"

"What?"

"Our announcement that the characters and situations in these stories bear no resemblance to actual persons living or dead."

"Oh."

"Is that all you have to say? Think of the libel suits! We'll be ruined. I don't know why I let myself be talked into adding a science fiction book anyway. Holderness, you're fired."

"But Mr. Young—"

"You have no idea the trouble we can get into leaving that announcement off. Get out of this office!"

* * *

K-17 removed a copy of *Atomic Science Stories* from the newsstand and went up to his hotel room. He sat down to read it.

He had been attracted by the picture of the space ship on the cover, because it reminded him very much of the one in which he had come to Earth from Rigel IV. And then, when he looked closer at it, he discovered that the four-tentacled purple creatures in the ship looked not a little like his fellow Rigelians.

This made him homesick, and so, in direct defiance of the orders he had received from his superiors, he pulled down the shades and turned off the gadget that set up the hypnotic field around him. Once more he was four-tentacled and purple, instead of two-armed and pink, and it felt good.

He began to read through the stories. The first of them concerned an invader from another planet who was on Earth disguised as a man.

Good Vog! K-17 thought to himself. They're on to us.

He looked over the story again. They had some of the details wrong, of course, such as saying that the Rigelians—whom they called the Capellans, for some strange reason—had mouths like octopi, whereas actually they had no mouths at all. But on the whole it was a circumstantial and convincing account of the capture of a Rigelian spy.

The story had taken place in Philadelphia. That meant they had M-22. This was serious. He picked up his magneto-oscillophone and called the home base on the other side of the moon.

"This is K-17," he reported. "I have just read in a Terran publication details of the capture of M-22."

"Impossible!" the voice snorted in his auditory nerve. "We have been receiving regular reports from M-22."

"They must have replaced him with a human spy," K-17 mused.

"Good Vog! Do you really think so?"

"It's the only explanation."

"Good work, K-17, We'll be on our guard."

K-17 hung up and sat down again to read further. The next story dealt with an Earth landing on Mars.

But Earthmen *hadn't* landed on Mars.

Or had they?

THIS situation was becoming complicated. K-17 thought over all the possibilities. Was it possible that this magazine contained only Fiction? The title of the thing was *Atomic Science Stories*. He remembered that he had read a similar magazine called *Impossible Science Fiction*. Was the distinction between "stories" and "fiction" significant? A fiction was obviously false; but a story could be any narrative, true or not. Did this mean—? Good Vog, he wished he knew more about Earth culture. But that was what he was here to find out. They knew nothing, absolutely nothing, about Earth people. And they didn't want to

try to kill the inhabitants and take over the planet without knowing more about them.

He looked closely at the title page of *Atomic Science Stories.* He recalled that *Impossible Science Fiction,* which he had, of course, read every word of, carried an announcement that all the stories were fiction. He did not see any such announcement on the title page of *Atomic.* Doubt was wavering into certainty in his mind.

He telephoned the offices of the Young Publishing Co., which published the magazine. The secretary informed him that the editor, Mr. Holderness, had been discharged that very morning.

Discharged, K-17 meditated. Why discharged? Well, he told himself, if Earth had space travel and was keeping it a secret. and if a magazine violated its security precautions and published a story about it, of course they'd discharge the editor. If it was a fiction magazine, that would be different. But a magazine that printed *stories* — some of them true, like the one about the capture of M-22. . . .

He called headquarters again, on his magneto-oscillophone. "Earth has space travel!" he announced breathlessly.

"What? Don't be silly." The voice in his auditory nerve was irritated.

"A magazine published an account of it, and the editor was discharged this morning for security reasons."

"What? Are you sure?"

"I just telephoned the office of the magazine and verified everything."

"Report to the saucer station immediately. You're coming back to headquarters. We'll get out the word to all our other operatives."

"Except M-22."

"Yes, of course. We'll have to leave him behind. It's really too bad. The planet offered such nice possibilities."

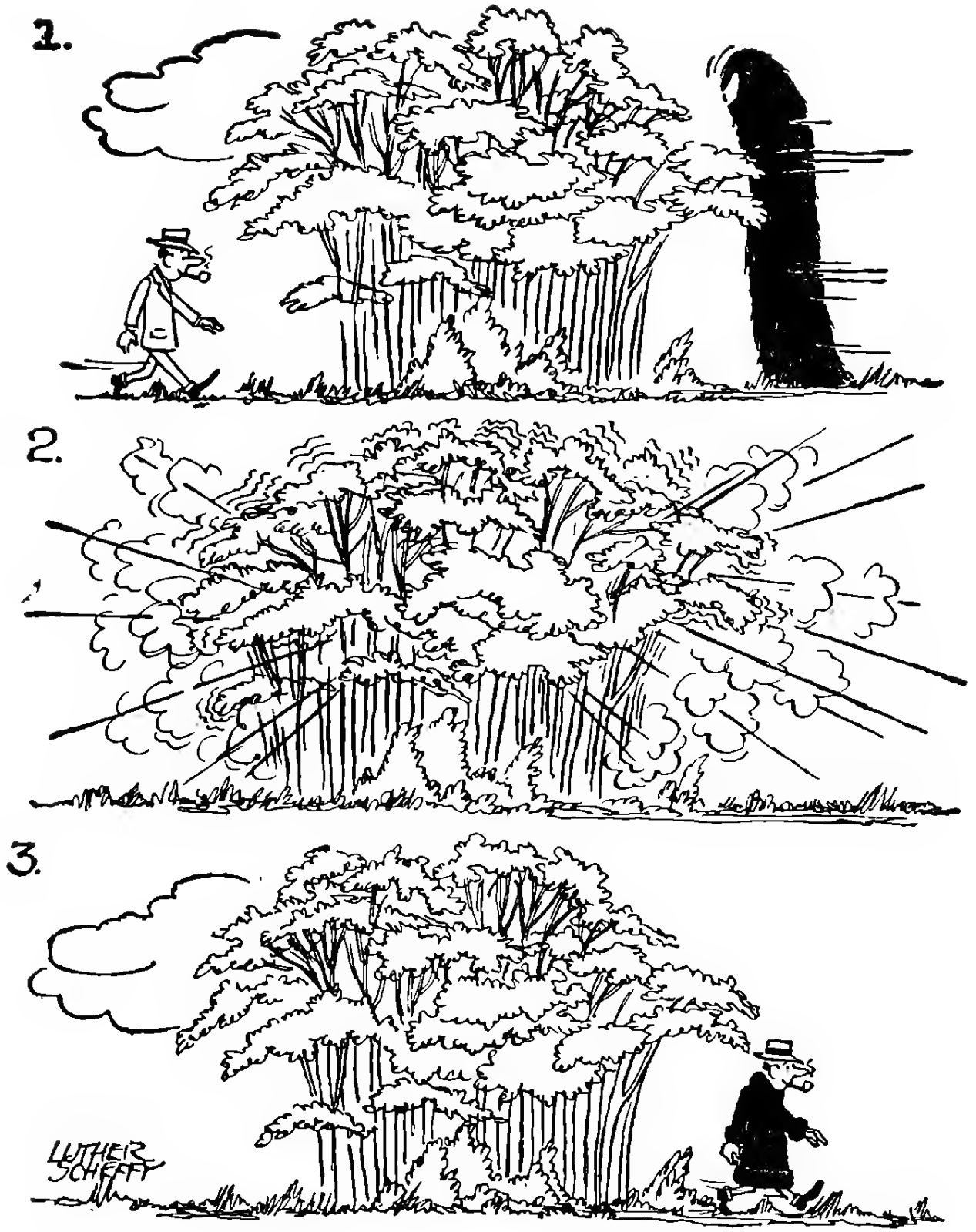
They hung up.

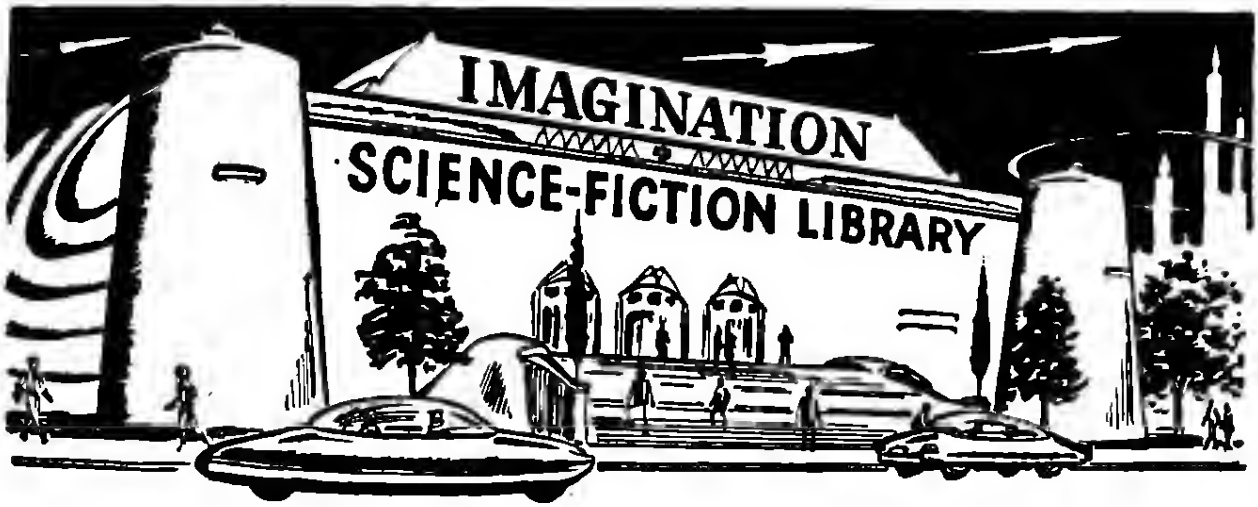
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"No, Holderness." Mr. Fribble said, "our magazine can't use you either. We can't have an editor who's careless enough to leave off the standard disclaimer. Why, there's no end of trouble we'd get into without that little announcement."

END

WANT FREE BOOKS by ROBERT HEINLEIN — MURRAY LEINSTER — FREDRIC BOWN? You can have them with a "MADGE" subscription!
SEE PAGE 130 FOR SENSATIONAL FREE BOOK OFFER!


1.
2.
3.
LUTHER SCHEFFY



— REVIEWING CURRENT SCIENCE FICTION BOOKS —

Conducted by Henry Bott

Hard cover science fiction is booming and many fine novels and anthologies are available at all bookstores or by writing direct to the publishers. Each month IMAGINATION will review several titles — candidly — as a guide to your book purchases.

PLANETS FOR SALE

by E. Mayne Hull, 192 *pages,* $2.75, *Frederick Fell, Inc. New York City, New York.*

It is insufficient, this reviewer feels, simply to take a conventional novel—no matter how well written—change the big city locale to an odd galaxy, alter the names of the characters by omitting consonants, and then substitute *gloopla* for steel or wheat—and then call this menage a science-fiction story. Yet, that is approximately what is done in *Planets for Sale.*

By her own admission, the author who is, by the way, the wife of A. E. Vogt, professes little knowledge of and less interest in science. Able to write however, she blends this skill with clever plotting and produces a novel which, whatever it may be, is not science fiction.

Outline: girl leaves crowded Earth—girl takes job in dynamic, growing galaxy—girl finds love with powerful businessman who fights the hideous SKAL. Also—financial wizards romp through novel.

If this is science-fiction—and it is emphatically NOT—the field is in a sad way. Fortunately taste is connected with sales. I think it easy to predict a resoundingly poor reception for this novel.

The author should devote her not inconsiderable talent with words to straight novels, or she should study the field of science fiction to see what is being done today.

It is interesting to note how a novel such as this deliberately inverts the stress on science, just as so frequently another novel will exclude all human relationships!

9 TALES OF SPACE AND TIME

edited by Raymond J. Healy. $3.50, 307 *pages, Henry Holt and Company, New York.*

Campbell, McComas, Brettnor, Neville, Fink, Fenton, Healy, Boucher, and Gold—good authors all—offer here an anthology of *new* writings of their own.

The anthologist, Healy, postulating that readers steer shy of anthologies in which they may have read the stories a few months before in magazines, and guided by the success of a similar previous venture, has produced here a fine group of stories with themes as diverse as their authors' interests.

Fenton's "The Chicken or the Egghead" impressed your reviewer tremendously. In an anthology full of good stories, this unconventional and disturbing bit of satire, stands out as an extraordinary fine piece of writing. In it, an unsuccessful Hollywood writer takes a pill which gives him the "common touch" and overnight becomes a tremendous success, with what results, you must read.

Not one of the other stories is poorly done either. In this book of good stories Fenton's and Boucher's stand out admittedly, but by small margins. If you feel you've read too much of conventional s-f, give this splendid anthology a whirl.

STARSHIP THROUGH SPACE

by Lee Corey, 241 *pages,* $2.50, *illustrated by Bill Llewellyn. Henry Holt and Company, New York.*

Lee Corey is a rocket engineer and he brings to this juvenile not merely the enthusiasm of the writer, but the persuasive reasoning of the technician. Through the eyes of Cadet Don Salter, you make the journey to Alpha Centauri in the first of the eventual starships.

A good portion of the book is a detailed story of the conquering of space, and you are given fascinating but reasonable glmpses into the technology of two centuries hence.

Lee Corey has taken a familiar tale and clothed it in purest gold. Only rational scientific extrapolations are used to take the story along; there is no fantasy here, even when the faster-than-light drive is postulated. But the story is not sacrificed to technology.

An added feature of the book is that a few blueprints of the starships are given, much as if you'd wandered into an engineering office and chanced across them. A little touch perhaps, but desirable. Furthermore you understand the refences better; this old-fashioned practice could be used to advantage more often.

There is a touch of romantic boy-girl relationship here too, without the usual cloying insipidity so frequently associated with novels aimed at "juveniles."

All in all, there is an adult quality about the book that could endear it to any s-f reader. There is a neat conception concerning the origin of the human race — very good! STARSHIP THROUGH SPACE is worth reading.



Conducted by Mari Wolf

LAST month I mentioned some of the problems you run into when you start out reviewing fanzines, and I also mentioned some of the criteria by which fanzines can be judged. Now, if you read very many fanzines you're going to start judging them, not on any absolute scale perhaps, but at least relative to each other. (Of course, you may find you *do* have an absolute standard. the image of an ideal zine to which none of those you receive measure up; if this occurs you might, if of one temperament, quit reading fanzines, and if of another, start a zine of your own—which has about one chance in a googleplex of measuring up either.)

I judge fanzines. There are a very few I think are the greatest, and would even send money for if they didn't so obligingly keep turning up for review. There are others I think aren't really tops, but are low priced and certainly worth a nickel or dime of anyone's money. There are still others which I think are works of art, turned out by expensive processes and obviously deserving higher price than less attractive zines, content being the same—but whether I think them good buys or not depends. Something that costs as much as a professional magazine really asks to be judged more harshly than something you get for a nickel.

So I'm going to try something I haven't done before: list the ratings of fanzines as I see them. I haven't done it for several reasons; one is that my opinions are only mine, and that undoubtedly a lot of you would disagree with me and that undoubtedly too lots of times you who disagree would be right and I'd be wrong. But lately several people have written in saying I'm doing a disservice by not list-

ing some sort of comparative rating; that I may praise two fanzines, one obviously much better than the other, and that the fan who writes in for the lesser article is squandering his money as compared to the fan who chooses the better.

(Sometimes a real slip-up happens. One issue of a zine is good, with lots of nice, legible material. The next issue, the editor's lost interest and you can just barely read it with a good strong light and a knowledge of the most common typographical errors.) But it's true that unless there's some numerical scale to go by it's hard to tell if a zine described is really good, pretty good, or just so-so.

Rating poses other problems though. How to do it? Pick the ten top ones and ignore the others? List them all, but in strict order from first to worst? I don't see how this can be done too well. For one thing, many fanzines serve specialized functions, and as such fall outside the regular ratings. How would you classify something like *Kaymar*, for example, on any absolute scale? If you're buying or selling stf material you'd probably list it quite high, but if you're completely uninterested in collecting it would mean nothing to you and end near the bottom.

Also, how would you list a group of fanzines like the following: a very good mimeo job with fine talent and a lot of personality, selling for ten cents; an equally fine photo-offset fanzine selling for a quarter; a rather slim zine, not particularly attractive but legible and containing some good material, as well as some not so good, selling for a nickel; and another photo offset fanzine, very arty looking but not containing any really topflight articles or fiction, selling for a quarter? Would you rate the last one higher than the third one, since its material would be slightly better and its appearance much better? Or would you take the prices into consideration too?

Anyway, I'd hate to try rating in a one, two, three, four order (though that's what I"ve done in the case above.) Sometimes the choice is clear cut. Sometimes it narrows down to eenie-meenie-minieimo. To me, a fairer way is to "grade on the curve" as the schools say—pick categories from perhaps one to ten, each category containing a rather wide latitude of merit, and trying to fit the individual zine into its proper niche.

What would be the factors in deciding whether Fanzine X is a three or a four, say? One factor, I insist, is legibility. No matter how good, if you can't read it it's got a rock bottom rating. Another factor is general appearance, and another most important factor is content—judged for writing ability, originality and what contest judges call aptness of thought. Another factor is relatively price, whether the zine is a good buy, comparatively, at a nickel, dime, or whatever.

SO from now on I'll try to mention them all, with ratings. And if you don't agree, if you think I've maligned your favorite fanzine or overrated something you consider a crudzine — well, I don't need to suggest that you write in and say so.

But remember, I'm not trying to say that any one fanzine is better than any other one. These ratings will be strictly comparative, not competitive. A good rating will only signify that I think the fanzine in question is a good buy. In other words, if you turn out a complete stinker, the absolute low in fanzines, but charge only two cents for it, you'll get a pretty good rating.

* * *

Among the fanzines this time are a group of periodicals from the National Fantasy Fan Federation, or NFFF. This organization has been around fandom for a good many years, and during its lifespan it has gone through cycles of activity and inactivity. Until very recently it was in one of its comparatively passive phases. Now, though, the NFFF seems to be in the throes of a great revival of interest among its members.

In *Postie*, the NFFF magazine of letters and comment, the organization has been running a sort of contest to find out what fans think has been wrong with it in the past. Walt Willis' criticism wins first prize, but there are many other good letters of suggestion in the *Postie* issues I have here. If new NFFF president Donald Susan, the other officers and the membership continue in the way they've started, the club is going to be something you'll really get a lot out of.

President Donald Susan writes: "The NFFF, of course, offers checklists, *Fanspeak* (a compendium of fan jargon), pseudonym lists, etc., and services, such as a manuscript bureau, fanzine adviser, fanclub adviser, a round robin writing criticism, etc . . . Dues go to Janie Lamb, Route No. 1, Heiskell, Tennessee. Dues in Oct.-Dec. '54 will be $2.00 and cover 1¼ years."

Of course, whether or not you're interested in joining a national fanclub depends on a lot of things, including whether or not you live in an area already plentifully supplied with science fiction fans and clubs. Still, the NFFF offers a lot, and if all its members keep up with the new surge of activity, it should keep on having more and more to offer.

* * *

THE NATIONAL FANTASY FAN: John Magnus, Federal 203-B, Oberlin, Ohio. This zine, co-edited by Nan Gerding, Honey Wood and Stan Woolston in addition to Magnus, is sent to all NFFF members. Dues are now $1.60 a year (or, as mentioned above, $2.00 for 1¼ years if you join in the last quarter of '54. Send dues to address noted in NFFF review above.)

The NFFF zine has improved considerably under the recent club reorganization, as it now publishes items of a more general nature than the strictly parliamentarian club news it printed for a while. However, the reproduction leaves something to be desired; the mimeo ink seems to smear on the grade of paper used, making the words a bit fuzzy in spots.

Orville Mosher of Project Fanclub writes as the "Fanclub Counsellor," answering letters sent in by NFFF members who're having trouble starting local clubs or keeping them going. Honey Wood and

Don Susan write on other NFFF services and bureaus, and Susan and John Magnus review fan publications.

The zine, and the parent club itself, seem to be much improved in the last few months, but there's still room for more improvement in the mimeo work.

Rating: 4

* * *

PSYCHOTIC: 10c; Richard E Geis, 2631 N. Mississippi, Portland 12, Oregon. I suppose that every fanzine has at least one fan who thinks it's the greatest, no matter how few other people may share even the littlest bit of enthusiasm. But here's a fanzine I don't see how you could possibly overrate. It's different; it started off excellent and has improved issue by issue; and it carries Geis' editorial stamp on every page.

Psychotic has gone off of a monthly schedule now and onto an irregular one; however, editor Geis promises that it will appear at least 12 times a year. Reason for the switch: he can mail 26 pages at a lower postage rate; thus he can afford to send out more material in more issues for less money, by mailing it 26 pages at a time. But don't taper off onto a less and less frequent schedule, please . . .

V. L. McCain's column, "The Padded Cell," is one of the best now extant; talent like Bob Bloch with his "A Word to the Wise" has moved in; Geis' drawings still make the covers stand out from all the others (though not so much as they once did, since Geis is now doing covers for other people too.) The issue I have here contains, in addition to the regular features, Joel Nydahl's "Finis" or explanation of why he folded *Vega* and quit active fandom. It's bound to raise controversy and a lot of antagonism, but I think it's very well put; Joel has a mature viewpoint toward fan publishing, whether you see it or not.

Anyway, here's *Psy*. In my opinion it's the best buy in fandom, and the number one zine to boot.

Rating: 1

* * *

CANADIAN FANDOM: 20c; quarterly; Gerald Steward, 166 McRoberts Ave., Toronto 10, Ontario, Canada. In his editorial Steward says sadly that "fanzine review columnists always make a special mention of the reproducton of *Can Fan* and forget to mention the material contained therein . . . " So I won't stress the fact that *Can Fan* is one of the best mimeographed zines in the field.

The material . . . There was last issue's "Ancient Man in Ontario," which was very good. "There's this issue's "How To Identify," all about identifying various types of flying saucers, from the *hallucination* to the *obsolete navy pancake style aircraft*. It's reprinted from the *Saucerian*, and is rather amusing.

Willkie Conner writes on "No More Time," all about time and duration, tending toward the metaphysical and too obscure for my tastes. Elizabeth Pope has a story, "Outside," about a woman who finds herself no longer in possession of her body.

This issue doesn't have the seri-

ous articles of the last two, and suffers somewhat in comparison with them. Why not more like "Ancient Man?" Even if some of the readership doesn't go for it.

I won't say the cover is very good—that takes you back to the reproduction angle. Anyway, this one is well worth your money.

Rating: 3

* * *

SPACE TIME: 20c or 1; monthly; U. S. representative Dale R. Smith, 3001 Kyle Ave., Minneapolis 22, Minn. J. Stuart Mackenzie and Brian H. Varley publish this one at 5 Hans Place, London S.W. 1, England. It's mimeoed, and perfectly legible, though its interior reproduction could be improved.

H. P. Sanderson in this issue gives a brief lesson on "How to Write S-F." It's quite a satire, and I'm sure if you take his advice you'll collect a lot of rejection slips—or will you? You still see examples of all the five writing styles he lists: the epic, superman, interplanetary cowboy, mood, and gadget. A neat bit of criticism that applies, alas, to too much writing—stf and otherwise.

There's a reprint of Walt Willis' "The Immortal Gael," (who is one James White, amid a few trials and tribulations). This was originally published in "Fantastic Worlds," and certainly worth reading if you missed it the first time around. There's a lot of feeling against most fan reprinting, but here there's a good reason for it—much of Willis' work has been published in US fanzines and has never been widely available to fans in the British Isles.

H. J. Campbell concludes his account of touring America, and there's another Writer's Workshop story, with criticism by professional editors. All in all it's a good issue; it's certainly readable. With justified margins and a better job of stencil cutting it could look as good as it is.

Rating: 3

* * *

FANTASY-TIMES: 10c; 137-03 32nd Ave., Flushing, N. Y. The newspaper of science fiction has been coming out twice a month for years and years now; it's in its thirteenth year of publication, and though I don't know if it's had this same schedule all the time, it certainly has turned out hundreds of issues.

F-T lives up to its reputation for giving you all the news of the science fiction and fantasy world, both professional and fan. Reading it, you can keep abreast of the otherwise bewildering changes in the field, new mags, old mags, new editors, foreign publications, radio, movie and Tv stf. Not to mention Conventions and other fan doings.

Rating: 3

* * *

KAYMAR: 10c; K. Martin Carlson, 1028 Third Ave., So., Moorhead, Minn. This is the fanzine strictly for those people who have science fiction or fantasy material to buy, sell, or trade. There are always lots of items listed for sale here; if you're shopping around for stf books or magazines you've missed you'd do well to try here. Also, advertising rates are very reasonable, and if you have stf material to dispose of, whether it's

a whole collection or just a few items, you should get good response here.

Very convenient for the collector, but would not appeal to those who are not in the market either as buyers or sellers.

Rating: 2

* * *

INSIDE: 25c; Ron Smith, 549 South Tenth St., San Jose, Calif. *Inside* is a very good looking magazine, photo offset, with some fine artwork and a professional looking format. (Two professional, some fan reviewers have complained.) It features both articles and fiction, all good quality for amateur writing, and it is certainly an amateur publication you wouldn't mind showing to your more conservative friends.

The issue I have here contains Hannes Bok's account of "Why I Quit Fantasy Art." Having known Hannes in the days when he hadn't quite made the decision to quit, I can certainly sympathize with his reasons. He wasn't getting rich painting covers for science fiction magazines; yet many fans had the habit of expecting him to donate his work for free, either to individuals, clubs, or for auction at conventions. (Many fan collectors seem to expect free art work, even from strangers, and are quite miffed if it isn't forthcoming. When a magazine donates art for auction it's a different thing; the magazine has already had its use of the drawing donated, and magazines are hardly in the business of peddling fantasy art as a sideline. But to expect the artist himself to come through, gratis, is a rather selfish attitude.)

Hannes, of course, had a lot of other things to say, most of them valid about certain segments of the fannish population.

Also in this issue: a lot of Terry Carr's wonderful "Face Critturs," Sam Sackett's "Why I Edit *Fantastic Worlds,*" and stories by Albert Hernhunter and Jules Archer, who is not usually associated with science fiction. The fiction is well enough written, but it misses, somehow.

A very good looking issue. Yet it doesn't quite have a personality of its own; you tend to think of it as one of a group of the newer photo-offset and printed zines.

Rating: 4

* * *

HYPHEN: 2 issues for 25c or 1/6; Walt Willis, 170 Upper Newtownards Rd., Belfast, N. Ireland. In this issue Mal Ashworth produces the convention report to end all convention reports. (It would, I bet, if used as he suggests.) It's called "The Dashcon Report," and it's a complete write-up on the . . . con held in . . ., and what went on there from the time the narrator arrived (exhausted, having just put out a one-shot) until the end. The activities of the . . . con take place, not in the meetings, but late at night in some fan's rooms. Lots of Big Name Fans are present, too many to mention individually, of course.

Except for the dashes, you'd honestly think you were reading a standard fan convention report. It makes you realize how stereotyped the things can be. (The reports, not the conventions themselves.)

Lyle Monroe's "How to Write a Story" is reprinted from a 1942 *Spaceways.* What do you need? Blank paper, erasers, coffee, a drink of water . . . and so on.

One of the best things about this issue is its front cover, a before and after sequence of people and fans at a science fiction movie. Like the rest of *Hyphen,* it grows on you.

Rating: 2

* * *

FIE: 15c; quarterly; Harry Calnek, Granville Ferry, Nova Scotia, Canada. The covers, both front and back, are very good on this one. The front cover is by Dorothy Delaine; it shows the conventional picture of men leaving a rocket ship in a rather unconventional way that is most effective. The back cover is by Dick Geis, and if more need be said, it's the picture of a face—"Hotel Manager, after Convention."

Elmira .D. Shultz has a story/play/satire/article? in this issue, "The Case of the Nauseating Neofan." It gets away from the usual satire on fandom, which is replete with the catchwords of the moment and namedrops all over the place; in fact, this skit lampoons namedropping too, among other things.

The short stories by Desmond Emery and Joe Keogh don't live up to the quality of the non-fiction, Keogh's relying on a surprise ending that is quite elderly and Emery's on the also elderly theme of the rich villain deserting a doomed earth. The third story, by Dottie Delaine, depends for its effects on the use of Old English script.

Reproduction is good; the zine has tremendous potentialities as a humor medium, for its satire is much, much superior to its other contents.

Rating: 4

* * *

EISFA: 5c; Juanita Wellons, 224 South College, Muncie, Indiana. This one is the "monthly publication of and by (mainly) the Eastern Indiana Science Fiction Association." It is qute well mimeoed; its diversified in content; and though it's not one of the top zines in the market you could sure do a lot worse with your nickel.

In the current issue the fiction is on the lighter side, with one story, Thomas Stratton's, about a tyrannosaur and a mad scientist. This story runs to footnotes, with each footnote being a supposedly witty saying. Then there's A. H. Nietz' "Saucer Collector," about a humanoid who lands a flying saucer in search of . . . surprise ending.

The movie review on "The Twonky" sounded very good. Then there's a series of cartoons by either R. S. Carlson or editor Wellons or both, "The Science Fiction Fan As Seen By:" The idea's all right, but the cartooning could be improved.

Rating: 4

* * *

VULCAN: 15c; Terry Carr, 134 Cambridge, St., San Francisco 12, Calif. One of the things you're never supposed to do, according to fan critics, is mimeo with red ink on yellow paper; it doesn't show up. Terry Carr manages to mimeo quite a few pages of red on yellow, and it doesn't look bad

at all. Maybe he's just got a better trained mimeo.

One thing about this zine; if you go in for fan artwork, especially of the cartoon variety, you'll like this one. Dave Rike has a lot of drawings in it, but the one I think best, by a long ways, is signed DE. Dave English. It's captioned quite simply, "I thought it decidedly odd that no one had noticed the 'gator before . . . "

Rating: 4

* * *

FEN: 10c; Mitchell Nokrog, 1130 Abbot Blvd., Palisade, N. J. Nokrog and William Gorken put this one out irregularly. It's a slim (10 page) zine, with contents ranging from Gorken's writeup on flying saucers to Alexander Michelini's account of rocket ship "Racing: 2882." The mimeography is fair; the overall appearance is lowered by the apparently freehand lettering on titles. The writing level is rather low.

Rating: 8.

* *

OOPSLA: 15c; Gregg Calkins, 2817 11th St., Santa Monica, Calif. in this issue Vernon L. McCain's "The Mark of McCain" is excellent as usual. This time he discusses his choice for the top stf novel of 1953. He ends with two selections, Sturgeon's "More than Human" and Clarke's "Childhood's End." I don't agree with him on many points, especially as regards the continuity in "Childhood's End," but I think anyone will agree that McCain states his reasons for preference most succinctly.

Also in this issue is Walt Willis. To me "The Harp that Once or Twice" is especially good this time, since it concerns Willis' trip across America after the Chicago Convention, and that trip, with WAW along, is one I'll never forget. (Gad, the way Willis remembers all, and tells it . . . *What* will he say, if anything, about that river in Utah?)

Terry Carr's Face Critturs (At a Used Mag Store) are as good as always, and the general quality of reproduction is fine indeed.

Rating: 3

* * *

ECLIPSE: 10c; Raymond M. Thompson, 410 S. 4th St., Norfolk, Nebraska. Editor Thompson wrote me once chiding me on not distinguishing between hecto and ditto. Seems *Eclipse* was dittoed then and I'd said it was hectoed. (I still can't tell them apart; if the hecto job is good, it looks exactly like ditto to me; they're both the same process basically, aren't they, except that ditto is more mechanized?)

Anyway, this issue is neither hectoed nor dittoed. It's mimeoed. Why? The mimeoing is poor; in many places the zine is almost illegible. Obviously a lot of time has been put in on it; it's got 26 pages of fiction, articles, and even some of Terry Carr's ubiquitous Face Critturs. But it just can't be well recommended this time; reproduction is too faint, much inferior to the dittoing.

Rating: 8

* * *

NITE CRY: 10c; bimonthly; Don Chappell, 5921 E. 4th Place, Tulsa, Okla. This odd-sized zine (7 by 8½, according to its editor) is

a rapidly improving one. Mimeography is above average; its articles and satire are definitely above average too, leaving only its artwork in dire need of betterment.

The issue I have here contains a rather good take-off, "Fahrenheit 32," about the Icemen. John Fletcher's story, "Love," is on the old theme of the robot in love with a human being, and depends on this twist for a surprise ending, but it's quite well handled nonetheless. And Larry (Val) Walker's movie review on "Riders to the Stars" says everything that needs to be said on the subjject.

Rating: 5

* * *

SCIENTIFICTION STORIES: 5c; bimonthly; John Walston, 1044-88th N. E., Bellevue, Washington. This rather new, dittoed zine has managed to get one of science fiction's old names for a story—David H. Keller's "Survival." Unfortunately, the story isn't very good, and some of its basic premises sound strange indeed coming from a medical man. Among the other fiction, Don Wegar's "Sen Yat Foo," about the migration of the Chinese from Earth, is scarcely fiction at all. In fact, this zine would be better with some articles to balance it.

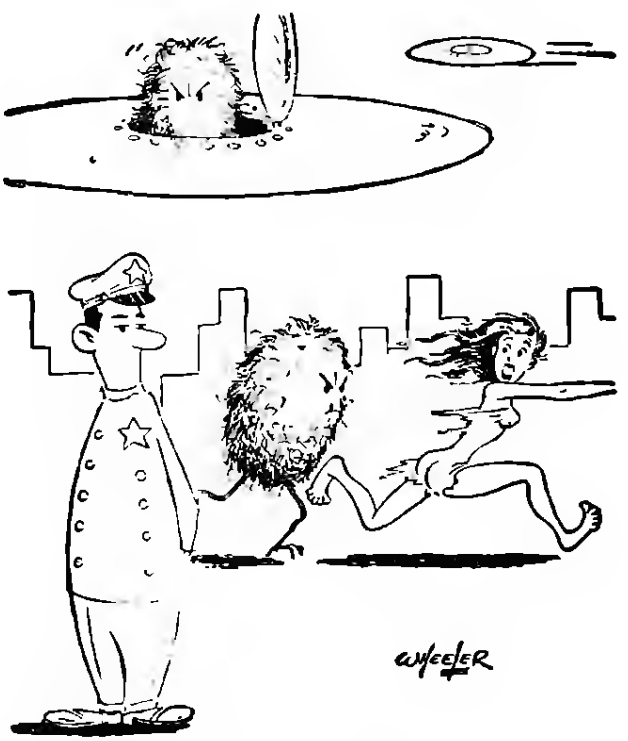
Not too bad for a nickel, though.

Rating: 6

* * *

Well, that's all in the BOX until next time. If you have any fanzines to be reviewed, or comments on the reviewing, send them to me, Mari Wolf, *Fandora's Box*, IMAGINATION, P. O. Box 230, Evanston, Ill. See you next issue . .

—*Mari Wolf*



"Darned Hollywood publicity stunts!"

★ Logic Paradox! ★

"THE barber shaves all people in town who do not shave themselves. Does the barber shave himself?"

This disarmingly simple paradox is as old as formal logic itself. But it is not trivial. Logic and mathematics have gone through a storm and stress because of this paradox from which they haven't yet emerged. Everyone takes simple logic for granted ("it is or it ain't!"), but few realize that the very foundations of mathematics are disturbed by this paradox.

Philosophers, mathematicians and logicians have been trying to straighten it out for fifty years now and they only seem to be more deeply mired in contradiction.

Should anyone think that this sort of thing is a mere playing with words and a matter of no practical value, let him realize that the designing of calculating and thinking machines is exactly dependent upon answering such so-called "silly" questions. How about it; "does the barber shave himself?"—think twice!



"Your tracks gave us quite a start!"

Letters from the Readers

KEEP AN OPEN FORUM

Dear Mr. Hamling:

I am writing this letter to congratulate you on your answer to Mr. Samuel Johnson's letter in the August issue of *Madge.*

If I understand Mr. Johnson correctly, he suggests that neither you, I, nor any other stf fan should discuss openly who should have control over a satellite space station because it would be "dangerous".

My question is this: "Dangerous" to whom, and why?

Mr. Johnson speaks as if we were members of a subversive organization that doesn't dare stick its neck out into the open.

I've always thought that the average (and I suppose that means all of us) stf fan was a good American, and by being a good American wanted peace in a world divided. Now we all know what a menace communism is to peace, and if we don't know it we should find out darn fast! Is it dangerous for us to say that we're opposed to the slightest possibility of that space station falling into communist hands? If it is then the constitution is meaningless and I'd better run and hide before the Secret Police come and get me!

Well, I've said my piece and I'm glad I said it.

As for you, Bill, and your great mag IMAGINATION, keep up the good work. Any opposition to communism you show is 100% ok too!

Louis R. Buchwald
2917 5th Ave., S.
Minneapolis 8, Minn.

The point Johnson was endeavoring to make, as we see it, was that it is dangerous—as he sees it— to come out for joint control, meaning give Russia the secret. Johnson's all wet about the dangerous aspect to suggesting this—it's the thinking he's advocating that's dangerous. But more about that later in the column as Sam pens his

rebuttal . . . . . wlh

THREE CLASSES OF STF

Dear Mr. Hamling:

Like a number of people who write to your reader department, I too always turn first to the letter section in any science fiction magazine I purchase. I feel that this way I can obtain a clue as to the class of people who read your magazine, and to the magazine itself. Now then, I have been reading stf long enough to get a good cross-section of the magazines published and I feel that I am entitled to voice my opinion.

This is how I would sum it all up. First I would group all stf magazines into three classes: *A. The waste of money type; B. Pleasant reading; C. True science fiction.*

There are only four magazines in classes B and C—two in each. Fortunately for you, *Madge* is in class B, along with *Magazine* of *Fantasy* and *Science Fiction*. Class C contains *Astounding* and *Galaxy*. However, lest you think I am belittling Madge, forget it. The gap between class A and B is (in my opinion) a few light years, while the gap between class B and C cannot have a fine line of distinction.

In the August reader section I was particularly annoyed by one letter, which, by the way, prompted this letter. It was the one written by Samuel Johnson. After reading it I could think of at least a half dozen questions I would like to ask Sam. I decided right then and there to write this letter. But then I read the editor's reply and was satisfied with his cross-examination. I now await Sam's answer.

In the meantime however, I would like to add my convictions concerning "US'UNS OR THE ROOSH-UNS". (Has anyone noticed the symbolism of "*US'UNS . . .*")

Since I read science fiction and enjoy it I must have a tendency toward idealism. Since I have spent five years with the US Air Force and have seen most of the USA and a good portion of Europe —and other spots on our small planet—I might also have a slightly realistic outlook. In a strict sense the two are incompatible, but slightly adulterated by common sense they sometimes mix a little. This will let you know a little of my own personality!

I'll go along with Mr. Hamling in his answer to Johnson, in every respect except one. "It is no secret that your editor has no use for Russia . . ." I would like to modify that by saying I have no use for Russian Communism. And as for Mr. Johnson . . . well like most politicians do, he uses a lot of words but doesn't say anything. He also says that editors should squelch fan discussion of political matters that border on the stf line (re SPACE SATELLITE).

If the editor were to squelch a discussion in this manner he could be accused of disrespect for the constitution which guarantees us free speech. And besides, discussions in general are what form opinions and these opinions are what guide the American people in their voting. That too, is politics.

But what I really want to mention is the possibility and consequences of the (theoretical?) Space Satellite. Here is how I see it. If the UN puts the money and technical knowhow and succeeds in launching a Space Satellite, well then, by all means let it be controlled by the UN. However, if the USA puts up the money, etc., I think we should shoulder the responsibility for it, control it, and use it in conformance with American ideals, and with firm discrimination allow privileges to be granted to other (international) nations.

Now, if Sam Johnson thinks this kind of talk will get us into hot water, well, I'm all set for a hot swim! . . .

William T Walsh
1608 11th Ave.
Brooklyn, N. Y.

First off, Bill, we have no idea or intention of squelching any discussion concerning a space station—or anything else for that matter. If anything we'll encourage such discussions. In regard to your last points, sure, if the UN built the station it should be a UN project. But that's just the point. We contend we dare not allow such a thing to happen—because if the UN sponsors it it will mean Russia has the secret, and that's the danger. Those American ideals you speak of—and of which we are all quite proud—would not come into play in the operation of a Soviet —or even pseudo-Soviet satellite. Indeed, they might be destroyed some fine morning ala Pearl Harbor—from space . . . We'll go along with you on your correction of our quote. It isn't really Russia we detest, it's their goddamned political tyranny. (We swore and we're glad!) But about Sam Johnson's reply—it follows . . . . wlh

SHACKLED THINKING?

Dear Bill:

Russ Brown wrote me, and mentioned what he thought I meant by "uninterpretable" letter. Namely this: "Quite agree with you, but don't see how Bill Hamling ever drew the implications he did from it. It doesn't seem to me that you are complaining about Russia being the villain in an argument or about the danger of some fen having a pink outlook, but rather that some idiot in Washington who doesn't understand fandom's outlook but who is waiting for a chance to discover some more reds will label fandom as a pink group." Russ Brown has stated exactly what I'm afraid of.

Fandom is already being observed as a pink group. If you can rest your patriotic soul for a moment, you'll catch the significance. If a fan steps too far out of line in such an argument he is going to find himself subject to investigation because of some nitwit. He is bound to step out of line in such a discussion that you seem to like to boost. I really don't give a tinker's dam about pinkish outlooks. You might be able to say that I have one too—because I'd rather back up a group of intellects than a bunch of people who are far worse than idiots.

You are my prime example, Bill. When you read my letter you

jumped to four different conclusions at once. I was giving out a warning, but now, presto-magico, fandom, if it has a pink outlook, is going to be turned over to the proper authorities—by guess who. In fact, about the last of your inferences *was* that *I* had a pink outlook, or I wouldn't have been warning those fen . . . Well, maybe so, but it's people like you who brought me to feel such a warning was necessary. I don't dislike you for it, but I suspect that you are a great fool for trying it.

You will draw inferences, and then lead others to believe that they are correct when perhaps they are not altogether. You think that if a person is against the "status quo" right now, he is automatically a communist. In our modern civilization (and this is said with a look of disgust on my part) it seems a hard thing to accept the fact that free speech is being limited so much. If you voice your opinion, and it's against public opinion, you are therefore a communist. That's one of the things that makes me feel like it wouldn't matter one infinitesimal particle if our whole culture was suddenly wiped out by our sun going nova.

As far as I'm concerned, when free speech *is* limited, there's something very wrong with people. I do advocate one thing—free speech. If I become a communist because I choose to speak my mind, let it be so. I sound like a hypocrite now, don't I? What with saying "keep quiet" and also that we should speak our mind. The thing is that people who would — should — voice their opinions, are in a vast minority. They are and will be persecuted if they seem to be too "contrary to public moral (ideas)." If you were to say, "I hate current practices in Washington," you are automatically labeled "possible subversive" by all who hear . . .

Well, let's just say that I warn against loud political arguments, because some ass is going to poke in his nose and draw inferences that fandom is a communist front, and he will do that because he doesn't understand the fannish mind. The great tragedy is that we won't be able to do one thing about it.

Now, again I ask you, 'kill this space station control argument and any like it or you'll get yourself and a lot of others in trouble. If you're bull-headed enough to still want to expose communist leanings by instigating arguments, go ahead; I just hope the readers have enough sense to stop of their own accord. If not, may Ghu protect them *and their thoughts.* (I hate to think what a hell-hole this would be without original thought. Too much thinking with glands. Too many inferences too.)

Bill, as I say, I like you, but you tempt me to throw rocks, instead of merely talk. I hope you print this letter to set the readers straight on me. If you don't, be prepared to accept a suitcase full of atomic bombs!

Sam Johnson
1517 Penny Drive
Edgewood
Elizabeth City, N. C.

We printed your letter practically verbatim so that you can't accuse us of not giving full space to your

unshackled thoughts. Seems to us that you're suffering from two ailments, Sam: You keep fearing shadows, and you're part of a group who like to label themselves 'intellectuals" when actually such a group is composed of naive "immaturials"—which is to say, you are living in a fog of adolescent thinking — no matter what your age. The only dangerous thing we can see is such misguided thinking as you speak of in connection with fandom. The world can do very well thank you, without the ivory-towered pronouncements of your so-called intellectual. You may recall the recent Oppenheimer case. And Oppenheimer was not at all backward in admitting he had been too engrossed in "free thinking" during earlier years instead of taking his head out of the clouds and looking around. ..Mind you, we think Oppenheimer is a great man, and a patriot to boot, but he experienced the very sort of misery you're beating yourself black and blue about. Point is that there is danger in thinking too freely—when you condemn the rest of us (who are in a majority, thank God) of being a bunch of stupid oafs who can't see further than our self centered noses. Actually, you're to be pitied rather than admonished. You're living in a world that's a tinder box; all the idealistic thinking you can muster won't solve the problems we face. The Soviet line has always been to foster such naive thought, for the mind is a fertile breeding ground, and is constantly coming up with such innocent socio-political states as Naziism, Fascism, Communism, etc. Instead of sticking your head in the sand, come up for air and be a realist. On the space satellite discussion it would be plain suicide to allow Russia to beat us to the culmination of this important technological step. Let's face it, communism and our democracy just don't mix. We're enemies. Enemies fight. And when they fight only one survives. We've got peace now, but don't hold your breath. The space station is coming—Russia has already announced plans for one. If they get it you may find yourself thinking your intellectual thoughts on the top of a mushroom cloud. Pleasant thought, huh? Wake up, bub. And if fandom thinks as you say it does, then it's high time some sense was pounded into its collective heads. The kind of fannish outlook you infer is an insult to the integrity of science fiction. We believe in free speech and full expression of thoughts in any science-fictional discussion. But allegiance can be only in one place. Or isn't that what you meant by a pink outlook?

. . . . *wlh*

PRO UN SPACE STATION

Dear Mr. Hamling:

I might as well get into that space station discussion. In your opinion the US should have complete control of it. Where, may I ask, would the US be today if such countries as Britain and Germany took that attitude in the development of jets and rockets? Surely this is a childish attitude to take, and besides, a space station would be absolutely useless

in war. Up there, high above the Earth, it could be completely destroyed. Think how easy it would be to plot its unvarying course and send up so many missiles it could not hope to stop them.

I think, as others do, that it is, or should be, a UN project, otherwise it will be the cause of much turmoil between nations.

Bob Munn
Box 657
Atikokan, Ont., Canada

Britain is our ally, Bob, so naturally we exchange scientific data. Germany? We weren't aware that the Nazi High Command was wiring all its V2 data to Washington in a spirit of good fellowship during the war! While we're on this subject—what would the rest of the world have done without the USA a few short years ago? Started wearing swastikas? As to the vulnerability of a space station, this is in the realm of speculation since no nation to our knowledge as yet has guided missiles capable of reaching out thousands of miles. And don't forget, from the Earth's surface a space station would be like shooting at a grain of sand—but the surface of our planet would make a nice big target. We respect your view that a UN control would make for better feelings among smaller nations, but how would it settle the world-wide designs of communist Russia? Would you care to trust a Red crew (when it's their turn to man it) with a slingshot over your head? That's the big question as we see it . . . wlh

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Dear Bill:

I have read your comments in the August letter section about the new anthology, EDITORS CHOICE IN SCIENCE FICTION, and I wanted you to know how I feel about it.

Frankly, I agree with you that the title is a misnomer. Not only *Imagination*, but *Galaxy* was left out because the editor, Horace Gold, had the impertinence to make a selection that didn't agree with the anthology editor, Sam Moskowitz. What's more, Boucher and McComas of *Fantasy and Science Fiction* were denied a say in the book (whether for the same reason or not, I do not know). These are three of my four favorite magazines (the other is *Astounding* which was included in the anthology) and seem to be the top four mags on most other lists as well. Yet only *Astounding* was included.

Amazing Stories, Famous Fantastic Mysteries, Weird Tales, Bluebook, Science Fiction Plus, and some others were included, none of these being of the stature of the three notable exceptions I have mentioned. In addition, *Science Fiction Plus* and *Famous Fantastic Mysteries* are both defunct and the space might well have been given to mags currently in business.

It seems that the only editor who had any *real* choice in the matter was Moskowitz!

Donald A. Thompson
RFD 1
Grand Valley, Penna.

Aptly put, Don . . . . . wlh

BETTER BY THE YEAR

Dear Mr. Hamling:

I've been watching Madge grow for about a year and a half now and must say it has shown improvement. During the '52-'53 period I wouldn't have given two cents for it. With '54 I must say you got into an upward trend that has put Madge right at the top.

I recently got a couple of your first issues, and it was the good stories in them, plus current issues that started me collecting Madge.

I thoroughly enjoy FANDORA'S BOX and the Book Reviews. Don't always agree with the latter, but they are to the point and not a lot of sugar spread on the authors' backs. Keep both of these features as they are a part of Madge's personality that I have grown to like.

Bought IMAGINATIVE TALES the other day and for the first time I enjoyed TOFFEE. I think I have never liked the girl because I missed the first—or what I take to be the first — TOFFEE story. Hope the tales will continue to be as good as this first one.

I know that you state IMAGINATIVE TALES is an experiment and you're not sure what it will turn out to be. I would like to suggest that right now IMAGINATIVES TALES is just a counterpart of GALAXY NOVELS. Both lack the personality of a magazine or a book for that matter. I would like to see you put some life in the new companion to Madge, add some features or a letter column. Make the readers feel it is their magazine.

The August issue of Madge didn't have a story in it that I did-

n't read and enjoy, but that isn't saying I thought they were all superior stories. No magazine hits that stride very often.

To show you how you stand with me, in my top four favorites: 1. IF; 2. IMAGINATION; 3. FUTURE; 4. GALAXY. The supposed dean of them all, ASTOUNDING, doesn't rate with me these days. As far as I'm concerned it's lost touch with the entertainment value in science fiction.

Guy E. Terwilleger
1412 Albright St.
Boise, Idaho

Don't miss the current number of IMAGINATIVE TALES now on sale. Two .TOFFEE novels are featured. As to future plans for the book, we're still feeling our way. But all suggestions kindly requested . . . . . wlh

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QUESTION TIME

Dear Ed:

I have been reading some back issues of *Madge*, and I thought they were very good. On the back cover there were pictures of stars, planets, and such. I liked them very much and would like to know why you stopped them? Did you run out of pictures, or what?

You have the best magazine, second to none. I like everything in it except FANDORA'S BOX. Why do you keep it?

Why don't you get some stories by Isaac Asimov? I think he is one of the best writers and I would like to see him in Madge.

Why is everyone talking about three stage rockets? They are as far as I can see, very impractical. A stage rocket going to Mars would require at least six stages to leave Earth and Mars—for the return trip. That seems like a sheer waste of money.

Jimmy Walker
3305 Tyler
Amarillo, Texas

Answering your last question first —money should mean nothing to a Texan, James! We'll bet you boys could build a whole fleet of stage rockets with your pocket change. If that Dallas "jillionaire" Master Hunt is reading this, what say, podnuh? . . . The back cover photos have been temporarily shelved

because of advertising commitments. Money, you know. Drop FANDORA'S BOX? The department is very popular with most readers. We haven't published an Asimov story because Isaac hasn't yet submitted a yarn to Madge. (But he wrote us the other day and said he was planning to correct that very soon. Ok, Isaac, we're waiting.) . . . . . *wlh*

DIG THOSE MAD CARTOONS!

Dear Ed:

Having seen that others are putting forth their opinions, I'd like to get in my small voice.

Oooo, do I dig those cool and sheer cartoons — bravo for your very talented artists.

But, I'd love to get my hands into the hair of the author of SUPERMEN NEED SUPERWIVES in the August issue. Even without looking I could tell the character is male. Which of the assorted planets would he like to inhabit with a wife he could boss around and feel superior to?

Betty D. Meyer
RFD
Holgate, Ohio

Any planet, Betty — it certainly isn't Earth! . . . . . *wlh*

EYE TO EYE WITH BOTT

Dear Bill:

This is the first letter I've ever written to a magazine. I've been enjoying *Madge* for so long that I just had to drop you a line.

I have just finished the August issue and I thought THE DANGEROUS SCARECROW an excellent story, but then, all of *Madge's* stories usually are. I don't know where you get your cartoons, but they're always good for a laugh. And I almost always use *Madge's* book reviews as a buying guide, for Henry Bott and I seem to see eye to eye on what to read and enjoy.

Lee Smith
125 California
Highland Park, Mich.

We've got a terrific supply of cartoons on hand, Lee, and more coming in all the time. We'll keep you laughing . . . . . *wlh*

KEEP THAT BLACK BEAST!

Dear Bill:

Bob Cobb says in your August issue, " . . . please tell Luther Scheffy to get some new BEM's." Well, now, just you thoroughly confuse Mr. Scheffy—tell him for me *not* to get any new ones if it means dropping our Black Beast! We like him out here!

We like all of *Madge*, in fact!

Shirley Smith
815 East Oak
Enid, Okla.

Rest your fears, Shirley, our Scheffy BEM is becoming an institution. We wouldn't think of dropping the hairy little monster! More coming up . . . . . *wlh*

TOUGH HEROES TALK TOUGH

Dear Bill:

I fully agree with Dick Edwards in the September reader section in agreeing with Jean Courtois on the question of strong language. It would certainly destroy the real-

ism of a character to have a tough hero suddenly burst out with a mere "Gosh darn those Martians!" after they break his head . . . If *Madge* ever gets cussless, I'll revolt.

I'd also like to register my vote for top mag in the field. There's really no question about it, it's IMAGINATION. Number two I rate, IF. Next FANTASY and SCIENCE FICTION. I disagree with those who rate GALAXY and ASTOUNDING at the top, although I do enjoy the GALAXY novels.

Let's see more of Robert Sheckley in *Madge*. That guy is tops among the writers.

IMAGINATION, for my money, is the best well-rounded magazine in the field. Keep up the good work!

Charles Durang
115 Moffett Rd.
Lake Bluff, Ill.

As we've said many times in the past, when a cussword appears in a Madge story it's because the emotional situation calls for it. We realize profanity is frowned upon, but we'll venture that few people can honestly say they've never found cause to employ it! Which just about winds up shop for this month, gang. Don't forget to pick up the new issue of IMAGINATIVE TALES at your newsdealer for a big treat with our gal TOFFEE, and watch for next month's issue of IMAGINATION on sale October 28th — the cover will be something really new and different. A real treat .. . . . wlh

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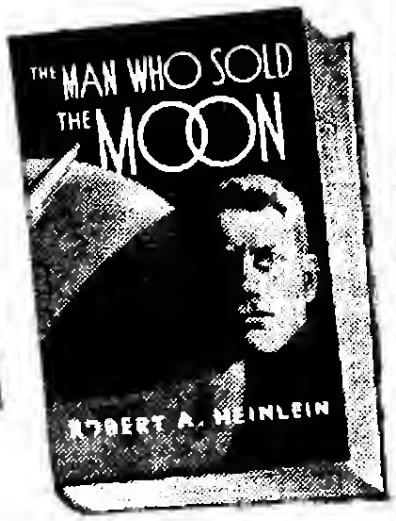
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That phrase comes from the Bible. It is just as true today as it was 2,000 years ago! But NOW we have the means to *think along the right lines!* Now we know how much better we can make our lives by simply releasing and putting to work the tremendous forces which have been lying dormant in our minds!

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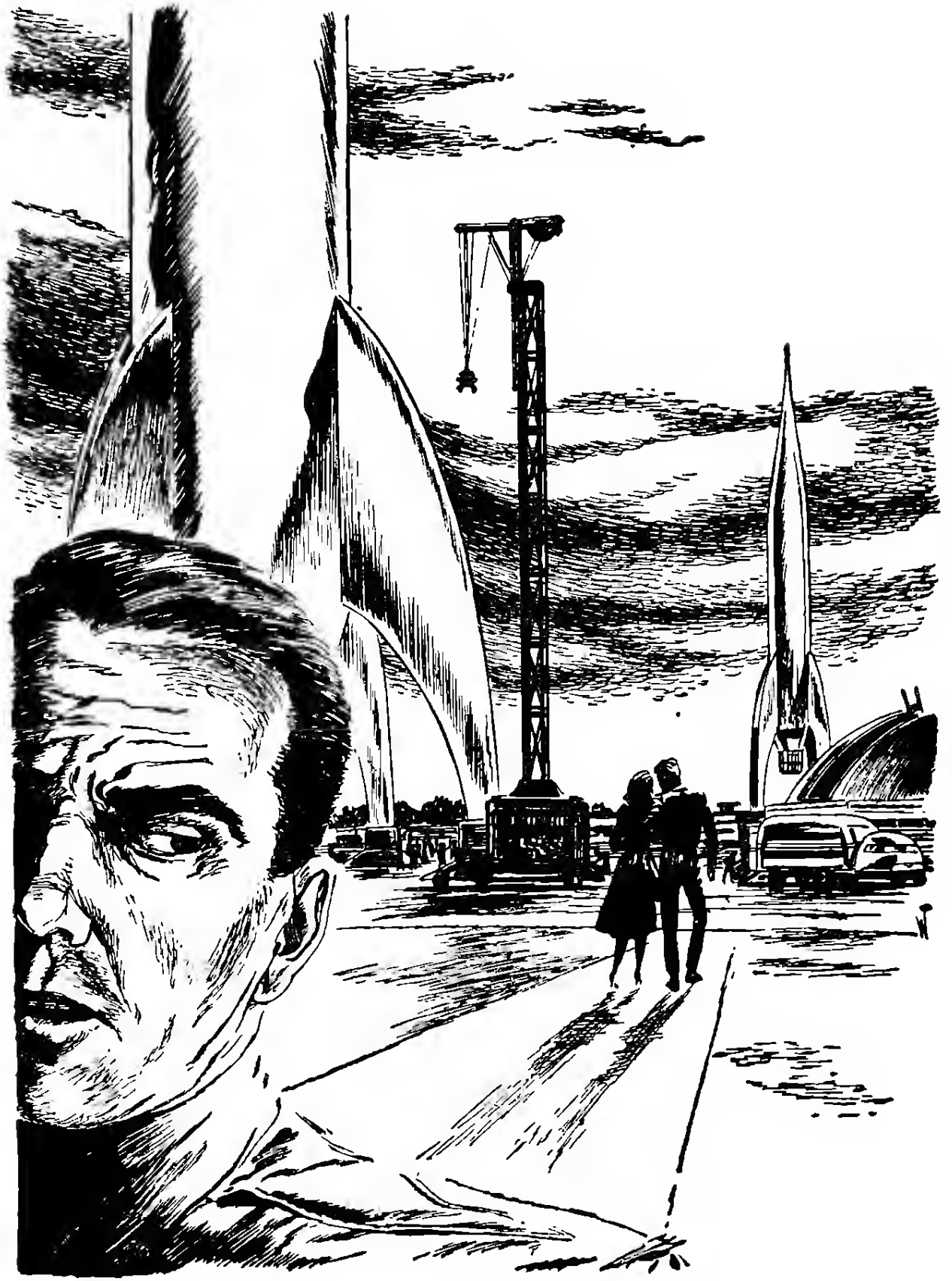
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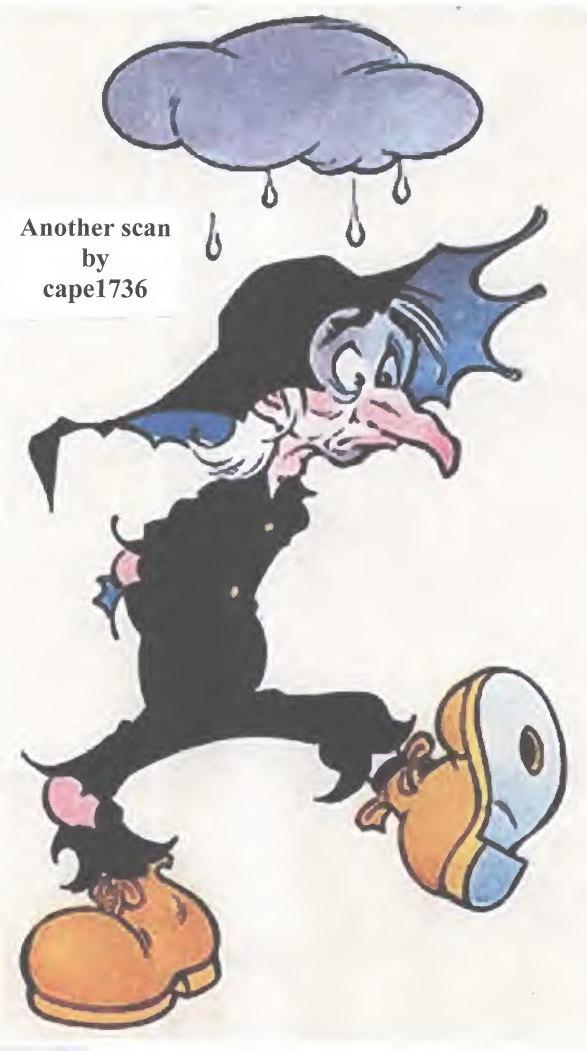
Geoff St. Reynard

January 9th, 1955 began like any normal day on Earth. Then suddenly our planet tossed in a death agony. The Green Men had landed . . .

DESPITE conflicting reports, the Air Force believed in the flying saucers. The scares began in 1947 and as a responsible agency the Air Force had to start investigations. At various times they'd cautiously release some information; then there would be some hysteria and they'd hurriedly debunk the whole business as "mass






Another scan
by
cape1736